

DIAMOND-DICK

BOYS BEST

JR. WEEKLY JR.

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 297.

Price. Five Cents.

DIAMOND DICK JR.'S BLACK BOX

OR
THE SECRET OF HALF A MILLION



BEFORE THE OUTLAW COULD SEE WHAT HIS MEN WERE SHOUTING ABOUT A FIST STRUCK HIM SQUARELY ON THE SIDE OF THE HEAD,
AND HE WENT DOWN LIKE A LOG.

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NEW YORK, June 21, 1902.

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DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S, BLACK BOX;

OR,

The Secret of Half a Million.

By the author of "DIAMOND DICK."

CHAPTER I.

SCHEMERS AND SCHEMES.

"None av yure ch'atin' now, ye bla'guard, ye!"

"Who is cheating? There is my bet; call me if you want to. Money talks."

"Begorra, it is bluffin' me ye may be, but Oi haven't dhe nerve to foind out by puttin' up dhe stuff. Take dhe poile, ye spalpeen."

The other laughed lightly, drew in the "pot," and at the same time threw down his cards face up upon the table, much to the amazement, and evident disgust of his opponent.

"Not aven a pair!" he cried. "Be hivvins, dhat remoids me av a shtory me Uncle Owen used to tell——"

"Your Uncle Owen again?"

"Yis. He put up wan noight at an inn, an' dhe gillie took away his boots to polish thim. Next marnin' dhe gillie came up to dhe room wid dhe boots and knocked at dhe dhure, and he says, says

he, 'Here's yure boots, misther.' Me uncle opened dhe dhure, and dhere stood dhe gillie wid wan long-boot and wan short wan. 'Phwat dhe divil!' says me uncle. 'How comes me boots are not av a length?' 'Shure, Oi raly don't know,' says dhe gillie; 'but phwat bothers me most is dhat dhe pair below are in dhe same fix, sor.' "

"Ha! ha! But what has that got to do with this case?"

"Fix yure two eyes on dhese cards and ye will see. Sure, and if you had had some av mine, and Oi had had some av yures, it was illegant hands we would both have had, allanna!"

The onlookers laughed, and the two players went on with their playing. It was in a saloon at Drummond, Texas.

Several tables in the place were occupied, there was a knot of men at the bar, and others were sitting or standing around idly.

The two men quoted were apparently paying no

attention to any one, but were thoroughly enjoying their game of poker.

One of these was a handsome youth, nattily attired. His companion was a young Irishman.

Two other men occupied a table adjoining, and, with a bottle between them, seemed to be earnestly engaged in conversation.

Of these, the one nearest the table first mentioned was a dark man of cunning countenance. The other, a thick-set, bearded fellow, looked the utter villain.

The first mentioned were Diamond Dick, Jr., and one Pat O'Dale, Bertie's friend and assistant.

While they seemed to be absorbed with their play, yet they were there for a purpose.

Bertie's ears, almost abnormally keen, were catching nearly every word that was being said by the two men at the table adjoining.

"But how am I to know that I can trust you, Buggs Terrell?" he of the cunning countenance was saying. "This is a big game, and I don't want it to miscarry."

"You will simply have to take my word, if you want my help, Mr. Weatherbee——"

"Hist! No names here!" with a look around.

"Then why did you mention mine? But, no matter, no one can hear; all eyes are upon those young chaps behind you. As I was going to say, men like me can't give gilt-edge references."

"All I ask is your word that you stand true to me."

"And that you have got."

"It is a play for a cool half million."

"So you said, and when you get it I am to have my slice of a hundred thousand."

"That is the arrangement."

"Then you can trust me, clear down to bed rock. I am yours for that sum, soul and body."

"All right, I'll have to take your word in the absence of your bond, and as I have got to have help anyhow I had rather trust you than any one I know of."

"'Nuff said."

"And now for the scheme."

"That is next in order. Let me have the hull lay-out."

"You know who I am——"

"You heard me say a minnit ago."

"I know, but my business here——"

"Oh, yes, I know you are one of that gang of dasted Government fools who are here trying to shoot

down rain out of our polished copper sky. It would be just as sensible to try to shoot snow down from the moon, I opine."

"That is not to the point, and it remains to be seen. You will think an earthquake has seized Texas to-morrow."

"We thought that yesterday, the way ye wur boomin' and bangin' away at nothin'."

"We are going to double the charges to-morrow, and if we don't shatter the firmament it will be a wonder. But that aside. Are you ready for the story?"

"That is what I am waiting for."

"Well, here it is: The secret of this half a million I have told you about is contained in a little black box that is in my possession, and there is only one way that I can dispose of it without drawing suspicion to myself."

"How is that?"

"I have got to lose it."

"I see."

"Yes, lose it where you will find it, and then at our leisure, later on, we will make use of it and recover the loot."

"I see, I see."

"The stuff is not in the box, mind you, but only the secret of its hiding-place. And the box must be opened with its key, and in no other way, or it is said the secret will be destroyed."

"It must be a queer box."

"Yes, so it is. I tell you this, so that you will not carelessly monkey with it until such time as I can bring the key."

"You have got the key, then?"

"No."

"Who?"

"The girl."

"Who the deuce is she?"

"Only daughter of one of the two old codgers who left the money. But, let me tell you all about it, for since I am going to trust you with the best part of it, the black box, I may as well trust you with the whole."

"That's right."

"Well, Benjamin Monckton and Zachariah Monckton, two miserly brothers, died nearly at the same time, and left the wealth we have under consideration. Benjamin had a daughter, Luella. Zachariah having died first, Benjamin left the whole to his daughter."

"Plain case."

"Yes, but here comes in the nephew, Simon Bristow, son of their sister. He is dead in love with Luella, but she scorns him, and he has taken it into his head to do her out of her half a million."

"Ah! now you are talking."

"And that is not all."

"Go on, then."

"The girl has a lover, and he happens to be a detective in the employ of the Government."

"Oh-ho!"

"Getting scared?"

"Well, it won't be a dead easy game, perhaps."

"Oh! yes, it will, for the little scheme I have in mind is bound to work successfully."

Diamond Dick, Jr., and his companion were playing earnestly and almost in silence now, giving no heed to anything but their betting.

"Go on," said Terrell.

"Well, Simon Bristow got the black box away from the girl before she had a chance to get at its contents, but she still holds the key to it, and he did not dare break it open for fear of destroying the contents——"

"Don't you think that's all a fake?"

"What?"

"About destroying its contents by opening it any other way?"

"Well, I don't know, and I don't want to run the risk by trying it when the key will be easy to be had."

"I thought you were only giving me a steer, to keep me from tampering with it."

"Oh, no; you will find that caution inscribed on the lid."

"That is a hoss of another color, then."

"Well, Bristow got the box, as I said, and the girl put her lover on his trail, and they have followed him here to Drummond. He is one of the rainmakers, you know."

"So you say."

"Now, the thing down fine is this: Bristow was afraid to carry the thing any further, knowing that Trusedale—that is the detective's name, Henry Trusedale—was on his track, and so he took me into partnership with him about the same as I am taking you. See?"

"I begin to see."

"I am supposed to have the black box safely hid away in my baggage, and so I have, but to-morrow

I want to transfer it to your keeping until such time as we can meet to make use of it. Meantime, I will get hold of the key, and then it will be easy going."

"But how are you going to get the box into my hands?"

"Now, that is where you will see the touch of my fine Italian hand in the game. To-morrow, when I make the first ascent for the purpose of taking observations for the captain in charge of our operations, I will take the black box with me along with the instruments. You will note the way the wind is blowing and station yourself about half a mile from the balloon's anchorage, to the leeward, of course. Just have a red handkerchief tied to a stick and the stick stuck in the ground about where you want the box dropped, and I'll drop it so it will fall within a rod or so of the spot."

"But you'll break it all to pieces!"

"No, I'll wrap it in a coat or blanket, and it will make the drop all right."

"Well, you know best about that."

"I will take all the chances. I can see whether you get it or not, and I will meet you here again to-morrow night for further discussion respecting our scheme."

"All right."

"But in case you have any reason to believe that you have been seen with it, or that you are suspected, you had better take to the hills and dispose of it in a safe place at once, where we can get it again at our leisure, weeks or months hence, as may be necessary."

"Kerrect."

"You see, I am trusting you, and I expect a fair deal from you."

"That's what I mean to give ye, you bet."

"If you do not, it will be an easy matter to put the authorities on the track of Buggs Terrell, alias Captain Calibre, the outlaw."

"'Sh!" with an apprehensive look about him. "Would you spoil it by making known here who I am? Have a care."

"No danger; I only wanted to show you that I have a little string to you, that is all."

"You will have no reason to pull it; I mean you fair."

"I believe you do, but I wanted to warn you not to try on any trick that isn't square and above-board."

"Well, is that all?"

"That is about the main part of it, for the present. Of course, I have another iron in the fire besides——"

"You might as well go the whole hoss, now that you are about it. I can be all the more use to you by knowing your whole scheme than by knowing it only in part."

"I don't know but that stands to reason. You see, I am somewhat smitten with the charms of Luella Monckton myself."

"Oh-ho!"

"Yes, that's the fact, and I have the good intention of making her marry me. Of course, that means the removal of Henry Trusedale, but that is by no means impossible, out here in this wilderness."

"I can't give you any help in that matter."

"You don't understand me; I do not mean to dye my hands in blood; oh, no; but he can turn up missing——"

"Enough said; I understand."

"Or, there can be a brush with outlaws, say, for instance, Captain Calibre and his band, and in the melee this fellow can be given his quietus. But that will come later."

"Yes, one thing at a time is enough. Hello! I guess Irish there has gone broke."

They turned and gave their attention to the two players near them.

"Begorra, it is all Oi have left," the young Irishman was saying, as he held up his empty pocketbook and shook it to prove that he had lost his last cent. "Will any mon give me a dollar, enough to give me somethin' wid which to call dhis spalpeen, and have a show fur dhe pot?"

"Put the wallet on the pile," said Diamond Dick, Jr. "I will allow you a dollar on it against my last bet. I don't want to be unfair with you, after your hard run of luck."

"Dhere ye are, dhen, and now phat have ye got? It reminds me av a shtory me Uncle Owen used to tell about a mon who was so poor dhat at last he offered a frying pan for sale, about dhe last article he had in his shanty, and his wife and childher gathered around him wailin' to know pwhy he would be partin' wid a t'ing loike thot. 'Och hone, och hone,' said dhe mon, 'Oi would niver be afther sellin' it but fur dhe sake av dhe little money to get something to put in it, me darlint.' And so wid me pocketbook. But, show down yure hand, and let me see phwat ye have dhere."

The idlers around laughed at the young Irishman's

story, and Bertie laid down the cards he held. He had only a small pair, and Pat O'Dale had won.

"Whoop! hooray!" cried Pat, jerking his hat from his head and swinging it wildly. "Sure, me luk has turned at last, and Oi'll not play another hand dhe noight fur fear Oi'll sphoil it. Oi dare ye to thry it again to-morrow noight, me hearty!"

"Very well, if nothing happens," agreed Bertie, and they rose from the table, and so ended their little horseplay for the time being.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had accomplished his purpose.

CHAPTER II.

A LIVELY LITTLE GO.

Meantime, two of the onlookers had drawn a little apart from the circle around the table.

One of these was about as tough-looking a customer as can be imagined. The other looked more respectable, but even he had a hard visage.

"What is it?" asked the latter.

"I'll tell ye what et is, Yank Thomas," was the response, "that young feller thar is Diamond Dick, Jr."

"What of that, Jeff? Who is Diamond Dick, Jr.?"

"Who is he? Who but the worst infernal detective that ever struck the Southwest!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so, and if your pard thar and mine have been talkin' over anything in p'tic'lar, ten to one that cuss has got onto it, every word."

"Get out! Why, he has been dead up to his ears in that game, cheatin' that young Irishman out of his du-dads."

"Mebby so, but all the same I am goin' to put the boss onto him."

Weatherbee and Terrell had stepped to the bar, and were taking a parting drink to seal the compact just made.

This fellow Jeff was Captain Calibre's lieutenant or right-hand man, and he and Weatherbee's assistant had just come into the place a few minutes before. His full name was Jeff Hogan.

He went forward to the bar and caught Terrell by the arm.

"Know that chap yender?" he demanded.

He pointed.

"No; do you?"

"Yes; I do, you bet."

"Well, what of it? Who is he?"

"Nobody but Diamond Dick, Jr., that's all."

"Thunder!"

"What's up?" asked Weatherbee.

"That youngster over there is a detective, one of the shrewdest on deck, too."

"What is that to us?"

"Nothing, unless he was there with a purpose, unless he was spying upon us and heard what we said."

"Impossible. We talked in low tones, and he and that wild Irishman were making an uproar most of the time. Well, I'll be going, old fellow; don't you forget."

"Trust me for that."

Weatherbee passed out, and Terrell and his bower talked together.

"You are sure of him?" Terrell asked.

"Sure of him! Of course I am sure of him. Didn't I see him down there at Dallas?"

"That's so, but what can he be doing here?"

"That is the question. What are we doing here? I tell ye, captain, I don't like the looks of things."

"Well, go and run up against him, then, and lay him out. I will be on hand to chip in on your side if it gets hotter than you can stand. He is our game, you know."

"You bet."

Hogan sauntered off and approached where Bertie and O'Dale were standing. Pat was getting off another story about his Uncle Owen, or one that worthy was accredited with having told.

"See hyer, you youngster!" Hogan blurted out. He motioned at Bertie.

"You mean me?" Bertie asked.

"Yas, I mean you. I would like to have a hand wi' you, at that same game."

"What same game?"

"Poker, o' course, jist what ye been playin'."

"Much obliged to you, but I do not feel like playing any more this evening."

"Don't, hey?"

"No, sir."

"You are goin' to play with me all the same."

"Well, you miss your guess, my pretty fellow. I am done playing for this evening."

"You mean you don't want to be caught at your cheating, hey? That is what you have been doing, and I mean to prove it to the crowd. Now, you——"

The fellow jerked a gun, but he was not quick enough by half.

Bertie had a spot straight at the tip of his nose.

"Easy!" he cautioned. "Shove that gun right back, or down goes your dog house!"

The man hesitated, ashamed of being forced to do such a thing as that against his will, and more ashamed to be beat at his own game.

"Do you want to die?" cried Bertie. "Put up that gun."

With an angry oath, the fellow jammed the weapon back in its holster.

"Curse ye!" he grated. "I'll see you later."

"No time like the present, if you have business with me," said Diamond Dick, Jr.

"I have got business with ye, and I'll hang yer liver on a stake to dry before the moon wanes, see if I don't!"

"Whew!" whistled Bertie. "That will be something terrible."

"I'll show ye," was the growl, as the fellow turned to walk away. "I mean business."

"Hold on, though," called Bertie. "If you are done with me, I am not quite done with you. Just come back here a minute, will you?"

The fellow looked, and seeing Bertie squinting at him over his gun, sullenly turned back.

"I just want to give you a word of advice," said Diamond Dick, Jr. "The next time you drop in on another man's game be sure you have got a hand that will prove up good."

"My hand will be good, when I play it."

"I am going to play mine now. You have accused me of cheating. Can you prove it?"

"Mebby not, but it is so all the same. You jist set down hyer with this Irishman again, and let me play his hand fer him, and see whar you'll be at."

"That would either prove nor disprove what you assert. I declare here before all that I did not cheat, and that you are a liar for saying I did. Now, then, what are you going to do about it?"

Jeff Hogan gave a snort of rage.

"Put up that gun," he roared, "and I'll mighty quick show ye what I will do about it."

"Will you?"

"Yes, I will!"

"All right, now is your chance."

With a leap forward, Bertie confronted the fellow at close range, at the same time returning his gun to his belt.

He was so close that Mr. Hogan could not draw his gun again, and he instinctively put up his hands

to defend himself, but the instant he did that Bertie cut loose at him.

Biff! clip!

First one fist, and then the other right after it, and over went Jeff Hogan as if he had been fired out of a catapult.

The crowd around laughed, some of them ventured to start a cheer, and Pat O'Dale started to tell of some similar event in the life of his Uncle Owen, but found no listeners.

The excitement was on.

About the time that Hogan went over Bertie felt something cold against his neck.

"Enough of this sort of thing here," said a voice.

"Maybe you want to take a hand in it."

Bertie had dodged back, with a movement like lightning, and while he knocked the other man's weapon aside with his right hand he pulled a gun with his left and covered him.

It looked as if a little whirlwind had been let loose there in the usually quiet saloon.

"Thunder!" ejaculated the new participant.

"And lightning, too, if you say so," said Bertie, coolly. "What did you chip in here for?"

"Because that man is a friend of mine, that's what."

"Then you had better take him away before he gets hurt, that's all, not to give you a word of caution yourself at the same time."

Hogan was now up and roaring again, and he made a rush at Diamond Dick, Jr., in a way that meant business, but he soon ran up against a snag that brought him to a stop.

"Back, ye omadhaun!"

It was Pat O'Dale who had placed his back to Bertie's and was ready for the ruffian with a gun limbered for action.

"What is this to you?" roared Hogan.

"Begorra, it is not seein' a square man turned down Oi'd be," answered Pat.

"He is a card sharp, and was cheating you out of your eyeteeth."

"Dhe same back into yure own teeth fur dhe loie it is!"

"You don't believe."

"No more Oi do. Sure, he gave me a square dale every toime, so he did, and as Oi am after wantin' to get aven wid him to-morrow night, it is not seeing him harmed Oi would be."

"Come, what are you going to do about it?" cried

Bertie. "If you want any more, say so; if not, up with your guns and git!"

"We'll meet again," grated Terrell, shoving his gun out of sight and wheeling about on his heel.

"Yes, I believe we will," said Bertie, calmly.

"And bad cess to yez! but it will be a meeting dhat ye won't relish, Oi am thinkin'."

The two men slunk away, having picked up more than their match in the young detective.

"That was well done," said a voice near Bertie.

Diamond Dick, Jr., looked around.

"Ha! you?"

"Yes, and that was about as near lightning as I ever saw, for action, I tell you."

"Pshaw! that was nothing," said Bertie. "They were too slow, that was all."

"Yes, I know that was all, but they would have had to be more than lightning to be quicker than you were. I never saw anything like it. But come with me."

"All right."

They passed out from the saloon, Pat O'Dale following them at a little distance.

"What is it?" asked Bertie, when they were out.

"Miss Monckton would like to see you."

"All right, I am agreeable to that. What does she want?"

"That is something that I do not know; I came for you at her request."

"Well, we'll soon know. By the way, I have got a wedge in the log now, and if we don't split it from end to end to-morrow it will be queer."

"Then you heard something?"

"You bet I heard something."

Bertie told briefly of the scheme that was on foot.

"The scoundrel!" cried his companion, who, by the way, was Henry Trusedale. "I will report him to the officer in charge of the experiments——"

"No, not yet," said Bertie. "Let him go his length, for we are too many for them, and they have no chance of getting away with that box. We'll be on hand to-morrow."

"They may change the plan, knowing now who you are."

"No fear of it; they would not believe that I overheard their talk if I were to swear to it."

"Well, I am willing to trust your judgment in the matter. Would not have sent for you, if I could not do that. What is your scheme to checkmate their moves?"

"Why, I will apply for permission to make the ascent with Weatherbee in the morning, and will appear at the last moment when it will be too late for him to make any change in his plans, and I'll secure the black box when we come down again."

"Good! And meantime I will have an eye on that fellow Terrell and be ready to pounce down upon him in the event Weatherbee does cast the box out of the balloon. But what is the matter with making a raid on Weatherbee at once and making him disgorge? But I see—I understand; Captain Calibre is no doubt here in force and ready to make it hot for us at Weatherbee's signal."

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLE FOR THE BOX IN THE BALLOON.

For several days the booming and thundering of high explosives had awakened the curiosity of the natives far and near. Some, of course, were aware what was going on, that it was the Government's experiments at rainmaking, but to many more it was a mystery, and they were crazy to learn what it meant.

Hence, many had set out to travel in the direction of the war-like rumblings, and on the morning of the fourth day of the experiments the little town of Drummond was full of strangers of every stripe and stamp, almost, from the cowboy to the Indian.

The balloon was a great attraction for them, and as the preparations were under way for the first ascent of the day, they stood around the swaying object of their curiosity with mouths agape.

The aeronaut and his assistant were busy at work, getting ready, and were getting their instruments together in the wicker basket.

The balloon was tugging at its moorings, swayed by a gentle breeze out of the north.

At last everything was about ready.

Weatherbee was about to cast off the key rope that chained the balloon to its anchorage, when two persons ran forward from the crowd and sprang into the car with him and his man.

They were Diamond Dick, Jr., and Pat O'Dale.

"What does this mean?" cried Weatherbee, glaring at them furiously. "What do you want here? Out of this basket instantly!"

"Hardly," said Bertie, calmly. "We had too sharp a run to get in to think of getting out again. Cut her loose and let her go; we are going up with you."

"The ginger you are!"

"Well, about as hot as that, maybe hotter."

"I guess it will be as I say about that," roared Weatherbee. "Get out of here, both of you!"

"Cool off," said Bertie.

"Will you get out?"

"No."

"Yank, throw that Irishman out; I will do the same for this fellow."

"Begorra! and ye lay wan finger on me it is Dinnis yer name will be, do ye moind thot!" cried Pat.

"And if you touch me this ascent will have to be made without you to-day," said Bertie to Weatherbee. "You are getting hot in the collar for nothing, old fellow."

"But by what right do you get into this car?"

"By the right of having asked permission of the officer in charge of these experiments," answered Bertie.

"And he has granted it?"

"He has."

"Thunder!"

"What is the matter?"

"I won't go up, that's what."

At that moment a soldier in officer's uniform came forward to the basket.

"Mr. Weatherbee," he said, "this is Mr. Wade and his man. He has asked permission to go up with you, and as it is a mild day I have granted it."

"But this is not an excursion balloon——"

"I am in charge here, sir. If you are ready, cast off and make the observations."

That settled it.

With muttered oaths, Weatherbee freed the ropes, and the balloon shot upward toward the bright morning sky like an arrow from the bow.

"Whurree!" gasped Pat O'Dale, as the peculiar sensation of the swift ascent almost overcame him. "Oi wonder phwat me Uncle Owen would say, an' he was wid me dhis minute!"

"Be thankful if you ever reach the earth alive," growled the aeronaut, "and never mind your uncle."

"We will take our chances with you," said Bertie.

"You may wish you had never come."

"We'll see about that."

"Fur dhe love av hivvin, sor," said Pat, beginning to get pale as the swift motion continued, and the ground below appeared to be running away from

them and leave them hanging in space; "shut off dhe stame!"

"Hold fast, Pat," cried Bertie. "You will be all right in a minute or so."

"Sure, Oi am reminded av a shtory me Uncle Owen used to tell about two men dhat were at work in a quarry, whin wan av thim fell into a dape hole and was nigh killed. Dhe other, frightened half out av his wits, ran to dhe hole and shouted out, 'Pat, is it mangled entoirely ye are? An' if ye are dead, spake!' And dhe other he says, says he, 'No, Mike, it is not dead Oi am, but knocked spachless.' Dhat's phwat's the matther wid me."

This caused the aeronaut's assistant to laugh, and some of the ill-will toward the unwelcome passengers appeared to be allayed.

Up, and still up, the balloon rose, until the shouts of the throng below could hardly be heard.

Bertie was looking down over the side of the car. Suddenly he espied what he was looking for, the red handkerchief on the stick, as agreed upon.

It was in an open space in the midst of a clump of chaparral, on the distant side of which a number of horses were seen, with a similar number of men near them.

About the same time Weatherbee grabbed up a folded blanket from the bottom of the car.

Bertie saw the motion and caught the blanket.

"Let go!"

"What are you going to do?"

"None of your business; I tell you to let go!"

"When I know what you are about. What is in this blanket?"

"That is none of your business I tell you. Curse you, will you let go your hold?"

Weatherbee leaned forward, fist clinched, eyes flashing.

"I will not let go," said Bertie. "The black box does not leave this car!"

With a snarl like a tiger enraged, knowing that his scheme was known, Weatherbee jerked violently at the blanket.

At the same moment Bertie caught hold of it in a new place.

The string that bound it broke under the strain, the blanket opened, and the black box fell out upon the car floor.

Pat O'Dale grabbed it up and tried to put it under his arm, but in the same moment it was seized by Yank Thomas.

He handed it to Weatherbee before Bertie could interfere, and with it the aeronaut climbed up into the rope network.

Bertie was after him like a flash, regardless of the peril, while Yank Thomas and Pat O'Dale battled in the car below.

Diamond Dick, Jr., cared nothing for danger; he had been in too many dangerous positions, where any man dared to lead he dared to follow.

He was swifter than Weatherbee in his actions, and soon had him by the leg, but in that instant Weatherbee flung the black box from him and down it fell.

Bertie instantly wound his arms and legs in the network and followed the descent of the black box with his gaze.

It was no more than a speck in the distance.

Weatherbee, too, was looking, and for the moment there was a stay of hostilities.

Pat O'Dale had downed his adversary, and was holding him by the throat in the middle of the basket, knee on his chest.

It was almost impossible to see the small object a few seconds after it began falling, but Bertie's eyes were keen and he kept it in sight, though once or twice he lost it for a brief moment.

Down and still down, far to the south of the red signal, over the stretch of chaparral, and at last it struck the sand a rod or two from where the horses were standing.

It was a place where the sand was soft and nearly white.

Instantly some of the men by the horses ran forward, and one of their number caught the object up in his hands.

"And now, curse you, you shall follow it!"

It was the voice of Weatherbee.

Diamond Dick, Jr., looked up instantly.

The man was bending above him with a knife in his grasp.

Bertie ducked and drew a gun, hanging by one arm and his feet while he did so.

"Softly!" he cautioned. "I can find you a good deal sooner with lead than you can find me with steel, my friend."

"I'm no friend of yours."

"And I'm well aware of the fact."

"I am going to cut the basket loose and hurl you to eternity!"

"All right, cut away, and I guess we can stand it as long as you and your mate."

"Curse you!"

He shoved his knife out of sight.

"You see we are all in the same boat," said Bertie, "and you have got to take her safely down in order to preserve your own precious neck."

"Well, curse you, you didn't accomplish your object, anyhow, and if you breathe one word of this matter it will cost you your life. You have the best hand just now, but the tables will turn."

"You have done a fine stroke of business to-day," said Bertie, as they regained the basket.

"What do you mean?"

"You were a fool to trust such a man as Captain Calibre."

"Why was I?"

"Because the chances are you will never see your black box again in this world."

"And av a certainty not in dhe next," declared Pat.

He had allowed Thomas to get up.

Weatherbee was looking at Bertie with interest, while at the same time his dark face was distorted with rage.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Just what I say," was the answer. "He is a prince of outlaws, is a man I have jotted down on my little list, and knowing that I am here he is likely to put all the distance between himself and Drummond he can before I can get after him."

"Yes, but he cannot open the box without my aid. But why talk of this to you?"

"It is needless, that's true," said Bertie. "I heard all that you said last night."

"Curse you! Had I but known it at the time!"

"Well, are you going to perform the business of your ascent or are you going down?"

"I am going to do the business that brought me here, of course. If you are cold you can step over and go down where it is warmer."

The balloon had now about reached its highest point, and was floating steadily along with the gentle breeze.

It was cold, so cold that Weatherbee got into an overcoat and wrapped the blanket around him besides, and, having done so, he busied himself with the various instruments.

Bertie and Pat had all they could do to keep their hands and feet from becoming numb, yet down below they knew people were sweltering in the heat of a summer morning.

At last the work was done.

Weatherbee pulled a valve rope, and the balloon began instantly to settle toward the earth.

That done, he turned to Bertie.

"Now, how is it between you and me?" he demanded.

"Just as you please to have it," was Diamond Dick, Jr.'s answer to the question.

"Do you intend to report me?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Yourself."

"How?"

"If you are desirous of drawing out of the bad business you have entered into I will say nothing, provided that you will aid in restoring that box to its owner."

"Well, listen to me: You have got to pledge yourself that you will not breathe a word of this morning's business to the captain, or, by the eternal! I will rip open the balloon and we'll all mingle our blood and bones together down on the plains!"

His eyes blazed, and Bertie saw that he evidently meant it.

Diamond Dick, Jr., however, had nerves of steel, and he did not for an instant quail.

"You can do just as you please about that," he said, carelessly. "If you intend to draw out of the bad business I will make no report."

"Then you will not pledge yourself!"

"I will not."

With an oath, Weatherbee reached up and caught another rope that hung within reach of his hand, but before he could jerk it, Bertie leaped up and cut it with his knife just above the aeronaut's hand.

CHAPTER IV.

TRUSEDALE IN A PREDICAMENT.

The interview of the previous evening between Diamond Dick, Jr., and Miss Luella Monckton had been with a purpose.

Miss Monckton had desired to have him promise his aid to her lover, Henry Trusedale, and Bertie had readily given that promise, needless to say.

From her he had learned more concerning the black box, though not a great deal more, for it was a mystery even to her, to whom it had been willed by her father.

After that interview Bertie and Henry had planned further their scheme for the morrow.

At an early hour Trusedale ascertained the direction of the wind, and taking a line in the same course, from the balloon, he went away to the chaparral and penetrated it.

There was a path near the point where he approached, and rather than try to force his way through, he took the path.

This path, while winding, continued on in his general course.

In a little while he came out into an open glade.

Just as he came out into this glade from one direction, a man made his appearance from the other.

There was a friendly clump of scrub at hand, and Trusedale sprang to cover behind that before he was seen, and watched.

The other man came on, and presently stopped and looked well around him.

No one was in sight.

Trusedale knew him, of course.

It was Buggs Terrell, or Captain Calibre.

The detective knew what he was there for, thanks to Diamond Dick, Jr.

Terrell came on, satisfied that no one was around, and stopped to cut a sprout.

This he trimmed off, sharpened the big end, and to the other end attached his red handkerchief, and stuck the stick up in the ground.

He placed it about in the center of the glade, or may be a little south from the center, and having so done, retired the way he had come.

The detective waited.

At the end of five minutes, no one having been seen, he made his way around the glade to the point where Captain Calibre had appeared and disappeared.

Here he concealed himself.

Some little time passed, and voices could be heard from the direction of the rainmakers' camp.

They were a considerable distance out from the town, of course, on a piece of almost uninhabited sand plain, where their high explosives could do no harm.

The voices became more and more numerous, and presently a great shout arose.

The balloon had been freed.

Trusedale looked, and in the same moment he caught sight of the big silk dome as it shot upward.

It could be seen that it was leaning toward the

chaparral, even though it was yet a considerable distance away.

While the detective watched, he heard a step near at hand.

It was Buggs Terrell.

A clump of the thick growth of scrub separated the two men.

Captain Calibre, too, stopped and watched the balloon, as it rose swiftly up and in the clear air.

Presently an exclamation escaped him.

Trusedale looked to the balloon, for at the moment he was watching the outlaw.

A thrilling spectacle caused him to start.

There was a commotion in the basket, or car, of the balloon, as if a struggle were in progress.

The balloon was nearly overhead by this time, and was at a considerable altitude.

Of a sudden a man was seen to leave the basket and climb up into the netting.

After him went another.

"Thunder!" cried Captain Calibre. "Is the game to be spoiled? Is that infernal young Diamond Dick, Jr., going to prevent him?"

The balloon reached the point overhead, passed it and still the black box had not been cast out.

The outlaw was excited, and was following the balloon with eager gaze.

"It will be lost!" he cried, in rage. "It will drop in the thick of the chaparral and never be found! Confound that meddling fellow! I will settle with him for his interference."

Trusedale was scarcely less excited than Terrell.

In turning, eager not to lose sight of the balloon, he made a noise that the other heard.

As quick as a wink, Terrell wheeled and faced him.

And as he turned he whipped out a gun, Trusedale doing the same, and they glared at each other fiercely.

"Who are you?" Terrell demanded.

"I am Henry Trusedale, Government detective," was the cool response made.

"The deuce you say! What are you doing here?"

"I came here to see what you were doing."

"You were spying upon me?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I have told you."

"Well, curse you, up with your hands!"

"Easy! If you lift your gun arm an inch I will let go at you. It is about an even thing between us."

"Curse you, you have cheated me!" yelled Terrell.
"You have drawn my attention from the balloon, and now——"

"And now the black box is somewhere in the chaparral; I saw it cast out just as you looked at me."

"You did?"

"I did."

"And that was what you were here for?"

"Well, yes, I admit it. I happened to know about your scheme."

"Curse you! you will never live to tell of it."

"Have a care. I can probably shoot as quick as you can. If it is to be a fight come out here in the open."

"And if not a fight?"

"Then you are my prisoner."

"Not by a big sight!"

Crack!

Almost with his words, Terrell fired from his hip. The bullet came within an ace of Trusedale's head, but he did not flinch.

He was made of the right material.

A fitting comrade for Diamond Dick, Jr., he would prove.

Crack! again.

It was but the fraction of a second after the report of the outlaw's weapon. Terrell was seen to start, and a tuft of cloth was clipped from his shoulder.

"Up with your hands!"

No sooner had the detective fired than his right arm came up to level, and he had a bead.

The start the bullet had caused Captain Calibre, had cost him the advantage of the "drop," and he was cornered.

A smile played around his lips, however.

He held up his hands, as ordered, high over his head.

"That was a close call for both of us," said Trusedale, coolly.

"Yes, curse you, and now that you have cornered me, what are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to take you to Drummond."

"You are, eh?"

"Yes."

"I'll bet you a hundred to ten that you don't."

"Don't be a fool. Drop your gun, now, but still keep up your hands, and I will adorn your wrists with a pair of bracelets."

"The deuce you will!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Of a sudden the cold tubes of two revolvers had been thrust into the detective's ears.

And at the same time the words were spoken Captain Calibre gave a hearty laugh.

Two of his men had appeared upon the scene.

They had come upon the two men unawares, and taking in the situation, had crept quietly up behind Trusedale.

"If you move an inch you are a dead man," one of his captors gave warning.

"And if you do not release me instantly, your captain is a dead man," was the cool response.

Trusedale still held Captain Calibre covered with his weapon.

Terrell paled.

There was a momentary hitch in the proceedings.

But it was only momentary, for, with oaths, the two men jerked Trusedale backward.

In an instant he was flat on his back on the ground, and the two fellows had their hands at his throat and their guns at his temples.

"Shall we blow his durn head off?" one asked.

"Don't kill him here," said their captain.

"Why not?"

"Too near the camp, and the scheme is known. It would be traced to us."

"Yes, but we kin be miles away before he is found. Come, what say? We kin spatter his brains all over the open hyar!"

"No, I say!"

"O. K., you're the boss."

"What, then?" asked the other.

"He has got handcuffs on him somewhere," said Terrell. "Find them and snap them onto his wrists."

"You bet!"

One of the men still kept his pistol to the detective's temple, and the other proceeded to make a search through his pockets for the handcuffs.

They were speedily found.

"Hyer we air!" cried the fellow.

By this time Terrell, too, was upon the hapless detective, and, with his help, the handcuffs were quickly put on, in spite of Trusedale's struggling.

"And there he is, curse him!" cried Captain Calibre, spurning his prisoner with his foot. "Maybe you will not cross my path again in a hurry, confound you!"

Having disarmed the prisoner, they got up.

"Goin' to leave him hyer?" asked one of the men.

"Yes, but he ought to be secured."

"Et would be a good thing to secure him with a rope around his cussed neck!"

"And his feet about six inches clear of the ground!"

"No, I tell you, not that."

"What, then?"

"Just tie his feet well, and secure them to one of these scrubs. He will not get away in a hurry. We want no blood on our plates here."

"All right, ef you say so."

This they proceeded to do.

"By the way, were you fellows watching the balloon?" asked Terrell.

"You bet we wur!"

"Did you see anything dropped?"

"You bet!"

"Where?"

"Et went south of where you left us, and mebbey fell clear of the chaparral."

"You think so?"

"Et seemed to be fur enough away to fall clear."

"Did you line it, as I told you to?"

"You bet we did; we jist glued our eyes to et till et was out of sight. But what ther mischief was goin' on in ther balloon?"

"Oh, that infernal young Diamond Dick, Jr., tried to block our game, but he will wish he had never put a finger in the pie before we get done with him. Got him tied?"

"Yep."

"Then secure him to that bush and we'll be off. There is no time to lose now."

This was speedily done, and, with kicks and scoffs, the trio of rascals left the detective in that predicament and hastened away through the chaparral in the direction the balloon had drifted.

CHAPTER V.

LURED INTO A SNARE.

The tallest building in Drummond save the church spire, was the leading hotel.

At an early hour on this morning two young ladies appeared on the flat roof of the extreme top of the hotel.

They were Luella Monckton and her maid and traveling companion, Kittie Kelly, a fresh and rosy young Irish lass of about Luella's own age.

They were on top of the cupola, the very highest point.

This had been arranged as a sort of observatory, and there was an iron railing around it about two feet from the edge.

It was comparatively safe.

Miss Monckton had a pair of field glasses in her hands when they made their appearance.

These she put to her eyes, and with them swept the horizon in the direction of the camp of the rain-makers in search of the balloon.

The balloon could just be seen with the naked eye.

Knowing the scheme that was on foot that morning, Miss Monckton had more than passing interest in the ascent that was to be made.

"Can ye see it, miss?" asked Kittie.

"Oh, yes, plainly, but we are too far away to see the people."

"Oi can see the top av it myself, widout glasses," said the Irish lass, excitedly.

Thus they chatted while they watched and waited to see the balloon go up.

"Ah!" Miss Monckton presently ejaculated.

"There it goes!" cried her maid, at the same moment.

To Kittie it was discernable as a whole, but her mistress could see it in detail, with her powerful glasses.

She watched it constantly, and in a little while further excited exclamations came from her lips, and her face grew deathly pale as she witnessed the struggle.

"Phat is it?" asked her maid.

"They are fighting, Kittie!"

Luella watched every movement, and a cry escaped her as she saw the aeronaut climb up into the netting, followed by Diamond Dick, Jr.

"Oh! he will be killed, he will be killed!" she cried.

The glasses brought the objects so near that she could see the expression of the men's faces, and while she still looked she saw Weatherbee hurl the black box from him.

While they were still watching the receding balloon, one of the hotel porters put his head up through the trap in the roof of the cupola.

"Miss Monckton!" he called.

She turned and answered.

"Mr. Trusedale has sent horses to the door for you and your maid, and asks you to come out to the camp."

"And we will go!" cried the young woman,

eagerly, her face still pale with suppressed excitement. "That villain shall be made to answer for his rascally work."

Putting the glasses in their case, that swung by a strap from her shoulder, she quickly descended to the interior, closely followed by her maid.

They sought their rooms at once.

"You are goin', then?" asked Kittie.

"To be sure we are going. No doubt Mr. Trusedale wants me to meet the captain in charge of the experiments and make my complaint to him."

"But you say they did throw the box out of the car?"

"Yes, yes, Kittie."

"Then the chances are it is lost to ye, Miss Monckton."

"Yes, I fear it is, but we will make every effort to recover it. I trust Henry for that."

They made all haste, and in a few minutes made their appearance on the hotel piazza.

There were three horses awaiting, on one of which a man was mounted.

He touched his hat at their appearance.

"Miss Monckton?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," said Luella.

"My name is Jones," said the man. "Mr. Trusedale desires me to conduct you out to the camp."

"Then you are one of the rainmakers?"

"Yes."

Luella tripped lightly down the steps, followed nimbly by her maid, and they were quickly assisted to mount.

In another moment they were off at a quick gallop in the direction of the camp.

Their conductor set the pace.

Little was said, only between mistress and maid.

They chatted as they galloped along, and Luella found no fault with the pace.

She was eager to reach her lover as quickly as possible.

Ere long the very last of the houses of the town had been left behind, and at last also the most remote of the adjoining farmhouses.

Ahead, then, lay the semi-desert place in which the rainmaking experiments were being carried on.

There was some timber, patches of chaparral here and there, and much sand.

Ere long they descended into a timbered ravine.

"We will turn to the left here," said their conductor, when they reached the bottom.

"Isn't this the trail, straight ahead?" asked Luella.

The trail was too plainly marked to be mistaken, where all the baggage of the experimenters had been carted, and where the people of the town had traveled back and forth.

"Yes, but it is blocked," said the man.

"How far that way have we got to go?"

"Only a little distance."

He rode on, as if taking it for granted that they would follow, and, after a moment's hesitation, this they did.

His manner had reassured them.

The farther they proceeded, however, the deeper became the ravine and the darker their surroundings.

At last Luella drew rein.

"I am going no farther this way, sir," she said, decisively.

"No, you need not, fair cousin, for this is far enough," said a voice so near at hand that it caused her to scream.

Out from the thick undergrowth stepped Simon Bristow.

At the same time two other fellows leaped out and caught the horses by the head, and the rascally conductor laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" his voice rang out. "How was that, boss?"

"You have done well," approved Bristow, "and you shall have your price for the work."

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Luella, pale to the lips.

"It means that you are now mine, whether you will or not, cousin," was the leering response.

"You knave!"

"Oh! call me anything you like, it does not matter; you will, ere long, call me husband."

"Never!"

"We'll see about that, my dear."

Luella made a move as if to thrust her hand into her pocket, but she was prevented.

"No, you don't," said her captor. "I will see that you do not play me any tricks. Here, you, come and help me disarm the pair of them."

This to the man who had lured them there.

He was promptly at hand.

"Ye murtherin' villains!" cried Kittie Kelly, boiling over with indignation. "It is scratchin' dhe eyes out av dhe lot av yez Oi would be!"

In her excitement her fine native brogue came out.

"Not a doubt of it," said Bristow, "but we are not going to give you the chance."

"What do you intend doing with us?" asked Luella.

She was ready to cry with vexation.

"Why, I am going to take the best of care of you, to be sure," was the reply.

"I demand that you let us go instantly, and allow us to return to the town, sir."

"Or go on out to the camp and meet your lover, eh?"

"You wretch!"

"That is all right, I can stand it. You were quick to respond when you thought it was Trusedale had sent for you, but it was I. Before I will allow you to wed him I will kill you!"

He spoke vengefully.

"Have you not done me wrong enough, robbing me of my fortune?" the girl cried.

She had been deprived of her pistol, and was powerless to do them harm.

It had been found that Kittie had no weapon.

"I care more for you than your fortune," cried Bristow. "I did not think so till I saw you come here in the company of that fellow, and then I vowed that he should never wed you."

Luella covered her face with her hands in despair.

"Shame on ye, ye skunk!" cried Kittie, her indignation knowing no bounds. "You lave us go, or, by dhe powers, av Oi don't screech in a way dhat will make dhe rainmakers' racket a baby's rattle in comparison! Oi will have dhe whole town av Drummond about yure ears!"

"Scream all you want to, my beauty," sneered Bristow. "By the way, you will make a fine wife for my friend here, if he will undertake to tame you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the accomplice.

"Are they to be tied fast?" asked one of the other men.

"That will depend on their conduct," answered Bristow. "Get your horses and mine."

"In Heaven's name, what do you intend doing with us?" cried Luella.

"Have I not told you?"

"Only your terrible threat, and I will never marry you—no, never!"

"At any rate, I am going to take you away to a safe place and see to it that you marry no one else."

"Have mercy and let us return."

"After all the pains I have been to get you here in my power? Oh, no."

"I will yield all claim to the black box—the fortune——"

"Ha, ha! When that is already in my possession, or, at any rate, under my control? I have got both you and your fortune."

"And you will not let us return?"

"Decidedly not. And now it rests with you whether you will be tied, as my man has suggested, or remain free."

"Do not tie us, I beg of you."

"Then do you promise not to try to escape from me?"

"Yes, yes, anything."

"Very well, but at the first balk you make I will order you tied and will treat you with mighty little consideration after that."

Seeing that they were in a bad fix, anyhow, the girls thought best to make the best of it.

Luella did not believe that she would receive actual harm at the hands of her cousin.

She did not think as evil of him as that, and she hoped that chance would offer for her and Kittie to make their escape.

The horses having been fetched, the men mounted, and the rascal who had led the young women into the trap continued to conduct the party down through the ravine.

At some time in the past no doubt a stream had flowed there.

Be that as it might, the ravine ran on and on, at some points cleared of its timber, and while there was no trail there, yet the bottom was comparatively good footing for the animals.

At last, after some miles had been traversed, it began to grow soggy, and the guide turned out to the upland.

Here they stopped for a few minutes.

Bristow and the guide consulted, a little apart from the others, and while they were thus engaged the sudden thud of hoofs was heard.

Instantly came a yell from the other two men of the party, and Bristow and his rascally tool looking quickly in their direction, they saw the two prisoners dashing away.

"After them!" yelled Bristow, giving his own horse a dig with his heels and starting.

"Shall we shoot after 'em?" one man asked.

"No, no! You might hit one of them!"

"I mean ther critters."

"No, no! Catch them!"

Away they went, pursuers and pursued, with all the speed of which their animals were capable.

There was here a level stretch of plain, with good footing, and as the horses had been coming at a walk all the way down the ravine they were in good condition for the race.

And with the girls it was a race for very life. They knew not what course they were taking, whether they were running toward their friends or further away from them; they had in mind but one thought of escaping from the miserable scoundrels into whose hands they had fallen.

CHAPTER VI.

GREAT RISKS IN THE BALLOON.

"Curse you, why did you do that?"

So cried Weatherbee, the moment Diamond Dick, Jr., had severed the rope above his hand.

"To prevent you from carrying out your threat, of course," answered Bertie, as cool as ice. "I have no desire to take such a drop as you proposed."

"You have rendered me powerless to control the balloon!"

"Your own fault; do the best you can."

"We'll all go to perdition!"

"That is where you purposed sending us, anyhow, so what's the difference?"

"I was only fooling."

"Then it was a mighty poor way to fool, is all I have to say about it. But do the best you can; I know you will have regard for your own neck; and I will risk mine where you risk yours."

"I must get hold of that rope again."

"No, no," cried out Yank Thomas, his assistant.

"Hold your tongue, fool."

"He means to rip the bag, that is what he intends, and I don't want to be killed, even if he does."

"Can you manage the balloon, do you think?" asked Bertie.

"Yes, I think I can."

"Then do it."

As he spoke, Bertie covered Weatherbee with a gun.

"No, he shall not touch a rope!" cried Weatherbee.

"You sit down there and keep quiet or I will save you the trouble of suicide," said Bertie.

He drew a bead at the man's forehead.

It was a thrilling situation, floating in the air hundreds of feet above the ground.

Diamond Dick, Jr., spoke in a way that carried the conviction that he meant business, and the aeronaut cowered down in one corner of the basket.

"And stay there," Bertie added. "Now, you take charge," to Yank.

This that worthy proceeded to do.

"Bedad, Oi will be glad enough to get me feet upon mither earth wanst more," muttered Pat O'Dale. "And if ever Oi get out av this fix aloive you can bet yure bottom dollar dhat Oi will never get meself in another loike it!"

"I don't blame you, Pat," said Bertie, laughing.

"Sure, it remoids me av of a shtory me Uncle Owen used to tell av a chap dhat was married whin he was quite young, not out av his teens yet, and he was forever bewailin' dhe great disadvantage it had always been to him. 'Shure,' said he, 'Oi w'u'd never marry so young again av' Oi lived to be as ould as Methuselah,' and, begorra, Oi am wid him!"

Bertie laughed and demanded:

"But what has marrying young got to do with being up in a balloon, I would like to know, Pat?"

"Begorra, dhe wan is down, wid no chance av gittin' up, wid a wife and ten childer, while dhe throuble wid us is dhat we are up, wid no chance av gettin' down."

"Ha! ha! Then you are opposed to marrying?"

"Begob, Oi am dhat same! Oi would not marry dhe best woman dhat ever stood in two shoes."

"Well, never mind, just keep your gun on that fellow there while I take a look at the land down below."

"Oi will dhat same, and av he as much as winks an eye or wiggles a toe, begorra, Oi will sallyvate him instanter at wanst!"

"All right, do it."

Pat leveled a gun at Weatherbee, and Bertie looked over the side of the car and down at the earth so far below.

It was still frightfully cold, but not so cold as it had been, or else they were becoming used to it, but the fact was they had descended some distance.

There was only the slightest current of air, and they were going very slowly.

Drummond lay far away, like a child's town of blocks.

Below was an undulating plain, on one side outlined

by a long fringe of timber, and on the other hemmed in by hills more or less rugged.

To the east was fertility and thriving farms and villages, to the south were vast ranges, far to the north was timber, while on the west lay what appeared to be a howling wilderness.

But Bertie's eyes sought the chaparral where the red signal had been displayed to show the aeronaut where to drop the black box.

He found it, but objects there were indistinct.

After studying the topography of the scene for a few moments, Bertie turned his attention again to the interior of the car.

He saw that Thomas had an anxious look.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"I can't take her down."

"Why not?"

"The valve line is out of reach."

"Can't we get it?"

"I don't see how; look where it hangs."

By some means it had become caught far up in the netting.

It would be hardly safe for any one to venture to climb to it, and yet there was no other way to get it.

"Have you got to have it?" Bertie asked.

"Yes, or float here all day."

"Then I will get it."

"Begorra, would ye l'ave me here wid two to wan against me?" cried out Pat.

"Well, then, you climb up and get the rope, and I will manage things here while you are about it," Bertie invited.

"Wurrool!" cried the Irishman. "Bedad, Oi think Oi will stay where Oi am. Go ahead wid ye, Diamond Dick, Jr., and Oi will kape house dhe while ye are gone."

"You can do it. Shoot if they make a move toward you."

"Needn't be afraid of me," said Yank.

So Bertie took a firm hold upon the netting and began to climb up in the direction of the line, and at last he came where he could grasp it with his teeth.

It was ticklish work, for he had climbed so high that there was but scant hold for hands and feet.

Having secured the rope, he descended.

He had barely stepped safely down into the basket when a strong gust of wind caught the balloon and made it careen.

And before it could right itself another and stronger gust came, and it looked as if the monster

of silk would tear itself loose from the car. The men had to hold on for life.

"Let me up, or you are lost!" cried Weatherbee.

He was pale.

"Do you mean fair, or treachery?" demanded Bertie.

"I mean you fair now. This blow will be enough to account to the captain for everything that is amiss."

"Well, it looks as if it will be death if we don't trust you, so I will take the chances on your natural desire to live as long as you can. Get up and take charge."

"But don't let him get at that rope," warned Yank.

"Mind your business, fool!" cried Weatherbee.

The car was now being jerked from side to side with such force that there was danger that its passengers would be whipped out of it at any moment.

Yank Thomas, hugging the bottom, was at the same time trying to secure the instruments against loss, while Weatherbee was engaged in disentangling some of the ropes.

Presently he got the valve line disengaged, and gave it a jerk.

To his dismay, it broke!

"My God!" he ejaculated. "We are lost!"

He was white as a ghost, and terror was in his eyes.

"What is the matter?" demanded Bertie, himself somewhat alarmed, yet cool.

"There is no way of controlling it now," said Weatherbee.

"Then we'll have to sit down and take our chances," said the intrepid Diamond Dick, Jr. "What can't be cured must be endured, so what's the matter with a quiet game of seven-up while we wait?"

"Your levity is akin to blasphemy," cried the aeronaut.

"Oh, no, it isn't," said Bertie, "but I have got a clear conscience, and so have nothing to fear if the worst must come."

"But we'll be carried hundreds of miles away, and in the end only to be dashed to death in a wilderness, perhaps, where we'll never be discovered and our fate will never be known."

Bertie expected nothing less, but what was the use of "kicking?"

The gale grew stronger, and finally all were com-

pelled, for their lives, to lie down and hug the bottom of the car with all their might.

It lasted an hour, and at the end of that time it subsided almost as suddenly as it had sprung up. And immediately afterward the wind veered and blew from the opposite direction.

Bertie looked over the edge of the car.

The balloon was perceptibly lower than it had been at the time of the beginning of the blow.

It was now going northward, as the compass in the car indicated, as if intent upon returning to its starting point after its recent wild flirtation with the elements.

Some of the netting ropes were broken, and another hour of such wild tossing must have been disastrous.

Weatherbee was dogged, saying little.

While Bertie was taking another look over the side of the car something about the scene below seemed familiar to him.

Yes, sure enough, yonder was the stretch of timber, yonder was Drummond, there were the hills on the west—surely, the balloon had been in a rotating current, after all.

And as he looked he saw something more.

Out from the direction of the line of timber were two horses, with riders, going at a furious pace.

Not far behind them were four more, as if in pursuit, and even as Bertie was watching them he saw puffs of smoke from the pursuers that told of shots being fired.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was eager in a moment to lend a hand to the weaker side.

And, could it be? yes—no—yes, they were women! He leaped to his feet.

"Weatherbee, we must descend here!"

"I don't see how we are going to do it," was the snarl.

"There is no way of working that valve?"

"No."

"And the other rope?"

"That would let us down with a rush," cried Thomas.

"What would be the effect of a bullet puncture through the machine, then?"

"That would let us down, sir."

Bertie whipped out a gun and sent a bullet through the great silken bag, and instantly a sound of whistling was heard.

The balloon began to drop perceptibly.

Bertie had taken a risk, but he was not thinking of his own safety at the moment, but of others.

Looking over the side again, he watched with interest the chase that was going on, and noted that the balloon was descending all too slowly.

He sent another bullet searching for the first.

"What are you doing?" cried Weatherbee. "You will kill us all with your foolishness."

"I am taking my chances of that," said Bertie. "I want to get to the ground."

"Don't do it again," whispered Yank.

"All right, I guess two holes will do."

The balloon was now descending quite rapidly and Weatherbee was alarmed.

He grabbed up a sandbag to hurl it out of the car, but Bertie grabbed his arm and checked him.

"Not on your life!" he cried.

His gun in hand enforced the order.

"But you will kill us all!"

"Not a bit of it. I'll take chances. I tell you we have got to land, and that as quick as possible."

"What is your hurry about it?"

"Look down and you will see."

The other three looked, and saw what was going on.

"Begorra, but we want to lend a hand dhere!" cried Pat O'Dale. "Oi never see beauty in distress, but Oi want to pitch in and lend a helping hand. And it reminds me av a shitory——"

"Never mind the story now," interrupted Bertie. "Every man of you take up a sandbag, and the minute we get about the height of a house from the ground fire them all out and that will check the descent so that we won't get our necks broken."

Weatherbee, as well as the others, obeyed the order, and all stood ready, while Bertie stood with gun in hand to check them if they made a move to throw out the bags too soon.

The descent was becoming more rapid each moment, though it was not dangerously swift, as yet.

CHAPTER VII.

PLAYING A LOSING HAND.

"Throw out!"

At last came the order, clear and sharp.

The balloon had come about as close to the round as Bertie cared to risk his neck without an effort to check it.

Out went the bags and the downward progress was checked instantly, though not stopped.

"Two more!" cried Bertie.

He was obeyed.

The balloon was then within twenty-five feet of the ground.

Its fall was further checked, but it continued and the basket struck the ground with considerable force.

The men were all thrown off their feet, and Pat O'Dale was tumbled over backward and deposited on the ground, where Bertie joined him as quickly as he could recover and leap out.

That much relieved, the balloon rose in air again, carrying Weatherbee and his assistant with it.

More sandbags were thrown out, and the balloon drifted away.

"Save us! oh, save us!"

Bertie and Pat were upon their feet instantly.

The two fleeing horsewomen were close at hand, and their pursuers were close upon them.

"Stand firm, Pat!"

"You bet!"

They had their guns in hand, and they faced the coming horsemen.

As the women came up they parted and passed the two young men, one on each side, and as soon as they had passed, Bertie sang out:

"Hold up, here!"

His own leveled guns and those of his companion spoke louder than words.

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"Business!"

With furious oaths, the horsemen drew rein, two of them almost throwing their animals over backward.

"Do you know what you are doing?" cried Simon Bristow.

"We are perfectly well aware," answered Bertie.

"Why are you in chase after these ladies?"

"That is none of your business."

"We are making it our business. Easy! the man who tries to draw a gun will take a tumble."

He saw Simon Bristow's hand sneaking toward his hip.

"Didn't you see their horses were running away with them?" that worthy cried, in his chagrin, as he removed his hand from the vicinity of his pistol pocket.

"Failed to see anything of the kind," said Bertie.

"Maybe that is why you were shooting after them a

little while ago. Maybe that is why they called out for us to save them. Come, you had better turn tail and go back the way you came."

By this time the two young women had checked their horses and stopped.

Bertie had recognized them.

"Shall we come back, Mr. Wade?" Luella called out. "We have no weapons."

"No, ride on and make good your escape," Bertie called out, but not for an instant removing his eyes from the men he was covering.

"But you are in danger."

"No matter. You know which way to go?"

"No, we do not; we are bewildered."

At that instant their screams were heard again, and simultaneously the rumble of hoof strokes broke upon the ear.

Bertie did not dare look, but told Pat to do so.

"What is it, Pat?" he demanded.

"Begorra, it is a dozen or more av dhe cutthroats a-comin' fur us," was the response.

"Then we are in a tight box."

"It is roight ye are, begob!"

Just then a shout arose.

"This way," called out Bristow. "We want your aid."

The two girls, with cries of alarm, dashed forward to where Bertie and Pat were standing.

"Oh! you cannot save us now!" cried Luella.

"You cannot save yourselves!"

"Phwat shall we do, phwat shall we do?" cried Kittie.

At the sound of that rich voice Pat looked quickly in her direction, and the instant he caught sight of her rosy face and bright eyes he was smitten sore.

"Hould yure whist!" he cried. "Sure and if Pat O'Dale ever died fur a swate face, he will do dhat same now, allanna!"

Their eyes met and the girl's face became more rosy than ever, if possible.

It was as Bertie had said, they were in a bad box.

Up dashed Captain Calibre and his men, never checking their speed until within two or three rods of the two defenders.

And not even then until Bertie shouted:

"Hold up, there! You are plenty near enough!"

He had whispered to Pat to hold the others covered, and now turned and leveled his guns at Captain Calibre.

They came to a sudden stop.

"Not another step, or you die!" Bertie warned.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Terrel. "What do you two chaps expect to do against all of us?" he demanded.

"That is one thing we will do, and if you don't believe it, try it on," retorted Bertie. "We demand that these ladies be allowed to go on their way unmolested."

"Well, what's hinderin' 'em?"

"These four men have been preventing it, and it looks as if you intended to aid them if you could."

"Well, what of it?"

"You will find out if they are not allowed to go on! You're too many for us we have to admit, but at the same time we have got the big call on you."

"Why, we are enough to eat you up!"

"Maybe, but some of you could not be in condition to do any eating by the time you got us prepared to serve."

"What are ye goin' to do about et?"

"I'll make a proposition to you."

"What is et?"

"You let these ladies ride away in the direction of Drummond and give them thirty minutes' start, and I and my pard will surrender to you without a shot fired."

"We won't do it!" cried Bristow.

"Then you'll take the consequences," cried Bertie.

It was a peculiar situation, and one from which they did not by any means see their way out.

The two young women had ridden close up to them, and Bertie was sighting his guns over the flanks of Miss Monckton's horse, while Pat was doing the same over the one Kittie rode.

Bertie was covering Captain Calibre, and Pat had a bead on Bristow.

"Begorra, it reminds me av a shtory me Uncle Owen used to tell," declared Pat, unmindful, for the instant, of the danger he was in. "He said——"

"Never mind that now, Pat," checked Bertie.

"Keep your aim on that fellow's heart."

"It is that same Oi am doing."

Of a sudden Captain Calibre's men gave a yell and dashed away in two directions on a run.

Terrell stood still since he could not do otherwise without great risk, and with whoops and yells the others began to circle around and around the two defenders like wild Indians.

Bertie saw that it was useless to try to fight it out, now, for the odds were too great.

"Phwat's to be done?" asked Pat.

"It looks like a bad job for us," said Bertie.

"And we have been the cause of getting you into trouble," said Miss Monckton.

"Don't mention it," said Bertie. "We would have been worse than cowards not to have chipped in."

"Sure, it is killed entoirely we'll be!" cried Kittie Kelly.

"Thin, begob, dhere will be two of us," declared Pat. "Oi will lay down me loife in yure defince!"

Kittie's bright eyes gave him a look that made him forever prisoner to her charms.

But there was scant time for even hurried words.

"Put up them 'ar guns!" yelled the circling horsemen. "Thar is no salvashun fer ye!"

"You had better surrender," said Captain Calibre.

"Say, do you value your life?" demanded Bertie, calling out in a loud voice.

He still had a bead on Terrell.

"Because if you do," Diamond Dick, Jr., went on to say, "you had better call off your outthroats and give us a chance."

Terrell went pale.

"You fool!" he raged, "a dozen of my men have their guns leveled at you this instant!"

"And I have got mine leveled at you. They dare not fire for fear of striking one of the ladies, while I have got a clear range at you. See?"

"And the same to you, ye gossoon!"

So called out Pat to Simon Bristow.

Bertie handed one of his peerless poppers to Miss Monckton.

"Here," he said, "take this and defend yourself, for this corner has got to give way soon."

Pat saw this, and he, too, having a brace of guns, offered one of them to Kittie Kelly.

"Light av me soul," he said, "take dhis, and av Oi doy Oi want ye to know that Pat O'Dale loved ye at sight, ochone!"

Seconds were soon minutes.

"What will you do?" demanded Bertie of Captain Calibre.

"Will you surrender or shall I order my men to fire?" counter-demanded Terrell.

"I give you two seconds to order them to fall back!"

The keen eye that glanced along the tube of the revolver decided the outlaw.

He did not dare take the risk of Diamond Dick,

Jr.'s not shooting; he knew that if he did shoot it would be certain death.

He gave a signal.

His men stopped their circling and whooping and each drew a bead on either Bertie or Pat.

"Oh!" cried Miss Monckton, "they will kill you! You had better surrender, since it is impossible for you to defend us further, sir!"

"We'll see about that," said Bertie.

"But, all are aiming at you!"

"And I have got as pretty a bead on their captain as he ever had on him in the world. One little twitch of my finger and out goes his light!"

"Put up that gun," cried Terrell, "or I order my men to shoot!"

"And if they shoot they kill me!"

So cried Luella, and she leaned over Bertie, partly shielding him with her body.

Kittie Kelly was quick to see this move on the part of her mistress, and took the same action with respect to Pat O'Dale.

Pat was so nearly overcome that he almost forgot the business of the moment, and for an instant closed his eyes and allowed his senses to swim with delight.

"Begorra, Oi can die happy this minute!" he cried.

But all was action, rapid action, and the little details we have given took place with lightning rapidity.

Of a sudden came the end, even before the two seconds' time Bertie had given Captain Calibre had elapsed.

The moment after the two girls leaned over their intrepid defenders, two of the horsemen made a dash forward.

There was a sharp collision, and the horses the girls were on began to rear and plunge.

In the confusion, Captain Calibre and Simon Bristow tumbled out of their saddles, and the corner was broken.

"At them!"

So cried Terrell.

Others had rushed in on the instant, even before the word.

Bertie and Pat were seized by arms and legs, and before a safe shot could be fired they were on their backs.

Knees were upon their breasts, and revolvers were pressed against their heads, and at the same time

others had secured the two young women and disarmed them.

Diamond Dick, Jr., and his pard had made a bold stand, but with the odds so terribly against them the result was almost inevitable.

They were speedily disarmed and made prisoners.

CHAPTER VIII.

DETECTIVE TRUSEDALE ALARMED.

Relieved of the weight of the sandbags and of two of its passengers, the balloon, meantime, had risen to a considerable height and was drifting away in the direction of its starting point.

The wind had changed since the ascent, and was now from the south instead of from the north.

"Good riddance," said Weatherbee to his assistant, as soon as the balloon rose.

"You are right," agreed Thomas. "No more such passengers wanted."

"You bet. Curse their interference, anyhow!"

"They balked your game."

"Not quite, for I got rid of the box, but the chances are about ten to one that Terrell never found it."

But in that he was mistaken.

After making Trusedale secure, in the manner shown, Terrell and the brace of rascals with him had made haste to rejoin their comrades.

According to what the men had said, Terrell rightly concluded that the black box had probably fallen clear of the chaparral, and so he led the way along the path to the open.

By the time he reached there the box had been recovered out of the sand, where it had dropped, and it was found to be intact.

"Mighty lucky drop," said Terrell.

"Wull, you are jist right," agreed one of the finders. "Thar was a rock outcroppin' not a dozen yards from whar we picked et up."

The box had suffered no damage further than that one corner was a little bruised and scratched.

Its lid was secure, and it was evidently as sound as ever.

Captain Calibre secured it in front of the horn of his saddle, and that done, mounted and led his band away to the south.

But to return to the man whom they had left prisoner.

The detective felt glad he was in no worse a situation, and was thankful that he was alive.

He might have cause to regret even that, however, he reflected, if no one chanced to pass that way for several days, unless he could make himself heard at the camp.

He believed that it would be useless to shout before night, when all would be quiet.

Nevertheless, he shouted at intervals.

It was useless for him to try to release his wrists, for his handcuffs were not such as could be slipped at pleasure.

He did make every effort to free his feet, though, but at the end of an hour he came to the conclusion that he had been left there to stay, and about gave it up.

He had tried every plan that his brain could invent, but all to no purpose.

The sun beat down upon him with fierce heat, and he had to shelter his face with his arms the best he could. It would be hours before the bushes would be any protection.

He continued shouting at intervals, but otherwise remained quiet. At last he heard a voice.

He roused up instantly and looked all round, but no one was in sight anywhere.

He called.

No answer.

The voice, however, was heard again, and another, and now nearer than before.

Then, of a sudden, came the explanation, when a huge black body came floating over the chaparral—it was the balloon.

It was so low that the car was dragging among the scrubs, and Trusedale saw that it was coming directly toward the place where he was, and as he looked the anchor was flung out.

Down it came, and not a rod from where he lay.

It slipped and jumped along, caught, slipped again, then caught under the roots of the very scrubs to which the detective's feet were tied!

The moment the rope pulled taut the balloon careened and the basket bumped the sand in the open space that has been mentioned before, and Weatherbee and his assistant leaped out.

It was only the work of a moment, then, for the aeronaut to find the ripline and deflate the huge bladder.

Trusedale called again for help.

"Who is that?" asked Weatherbee, as both listened.

"Give it up," answered his man Yank.

"Here, this way," called the detective. "For Heaven's sake, come and release me."

Filled with curiosity, the two men ran in the direction of the voice, and Trusedale was discovered.

"How the mischief did you come here?" cried Weatherbee.

"I was set upon by some cutthroats and left here in this fashion," the prisoner explained.

Weatherbee and his man exchanged a look.

"What were you doing here?" the aeronaut further inquired.

"I had walked here," was the answer. "But, come, you are honest men, at any rate, so release me."

There was nothing else for the rascally aeronaut to do, though he rightly guessed who Trusedale was and what had brought him there.

He knew that, and he knew that Trusedale knew of his part in the affair, but it was now to his interest to play the innocent and set his sails for another breeze.

"Certainly we'll release you," he cried, drawing a knife and quickly severing the cords that held the man's feet. He did not dare refuse, even was his will good enough, for help would soon be there from the camp to take care of the balloon, and discovery would follow, anyhow.

"There you are," he cried, when the last cord had been cut. "And now let us help you up."

He and his man lent a hand, and Trusedale was on his feet.

"Don't reckon we can get those things off for ye, though," said Yank Thomas.

"If you will just feel in my vest pocket you will find a key with which you can unlock them," the detective directed.

This Weatherbee did, and Trusedale's hands were speedily released from their unwelcome bondage.

"You have done me a great favor," said Trusedale, as he returned the bracelets and key to his pockets.

"And one I hope you are grateful for," said Weatherbee.

"Yes, I am that."

"How much so?"

"You want a reward?"

"See here, let's you and me understand each other," said Weatherbee, throwing aside all reserve.

"Well, speak out," Trusedale invited.

"I know who you are and you know who I am. If I didn't know you are a detective, I would know it now by your havin' the key to these handcuffs with ye."

"Well, what more?"

"And, being a detective, I know what you are out here for. Now, the business is right here: Am I goin' to trust you?"

"That is for you to say."

"Do you mean to keep your head shut, or are you goin' to split out to the captain?"

"We might as well talk plainly," said Trusedale.

"That's right."

"If you had put this question before you released me, you would have held a stronger hand."

"I released you because I wanted to deal square with you."

"Well, taking your word for that, will you promise to aid me in recovering that black box if I promise you that I will say nothing of what I know to your captain in charge?"

"Agreed!"

"Well, what of the box?"

"It is lost in this chaparral somewhere."

"You swear to that?"

"Yes."

"Ha! that reminds me; where are the two men who went up with you?"

"They left the balloon when we touched ground some miles from here, having had all they wanted of that sort of thing."

"Are you telling the truth now?"

"Of course I am."

"Well, their reappearance will prove that. For the present I will keep your secret for you, with the understanding that you are to try to aid me in the recovery of that box."

"But you know others are searching for it."

"And you will know whether they find it or not."

"Well, yes."

"Then it will be easy for you to post me. And, even if so, that is the only way you can redeem yourself by aiding me in its recovery."

"Say no more about it. Keep your head shut regarding what you know, and I'll make it right with you."

Trusedale did not believe the fellow meant it, but there was just the shadow of a doubt in his favor, and so he gave him the benefit of it.

Leaving him, he set out to return to the camp of the rainmakers.

On the way he found some of the soldiers running along the path in the direction in which they had seen the balloon drop.

"Seen that balloon?" one asked.

"Yes, you will find it in a glade farther along this path," answered the detective.

"You ain't the chap went up in it?"

"No."

"Thought not."

They ran on, and Trusedale continued toward the camp.

He was met by the captain in charge. He had made his acquaintance on the previous evening at Drummond.

"Ah! it is you, Mr. Trusedale? I took you at first for that young man who asked permission to make the ascent with Weatherbee this morning. Did you see the balloon?"

Trusedale told about its alighting in the glade.

"And all hands are safe?"

"Well, your men are; the others are not with them——"

"Not with them!"

"Your man says they got out where the balloon touched ground once before."

"Ah! I see. That accounts for its further flight, then. Looking for your ladies—I mean Miss Monckton and her maid?"

"No, they are at the hotel."

"At the hotel? A person who was here just now inquiring for them, said you had sent horses for them to come out here."

Trusedale gave a start.

"Who was the person?" he asked.

"Why, Mrs. Garrels, the widow who is boarding at the hotel."

"She is here?"

"Yes."

"I must see her at once."

"What is wrong? You had not sent for them?"

"No, nor thought of doing it. They were to view the ascent from the cupola."

"Then something is wrong, for they left the hotel on horseback with a man who said he was to guide them here."

"Your pardon, captain, but I must find that woman immediately."

Trusedale left the captain, and hastened into the crowd to find the lady whose name had been mentioned.

She was a boarder at the hotel, whose acquaintance Miss Monckton had made, and who had appeared to take somewhat of an interest in the young lady.

The detective had been introduced to her.

He soon found her.

"What is this I hear?" he asked, hurriedly. "Miss Monckton left the hotel to come out here?"

"Yes; did you not send for her?"

The answer to that question filled the woman with alarm.

"Tell me all you can about it," urged Trusedale, hurriedly. "I must lose no time in looking for them."

"You think harm has come to them?"

"I don't know what to think, Mrs. Garrels. Certain it is that I did not send for them to come out here, and they had no intention of coming."

"What will you do?"

"I must get some tidings of them immediately. I must have a horse and reach the hotel in all haste."

Taking hurried leave of the woman, Trusedale set about finding a horse, and at last found one that he might have the use of for the purpose he explained.

The trail into the village was so plain that no one could miss it, and he ran the horse hard all the way in.

At the hotel he pressed his inquiries.

There he learned all that could be told about the departure of the two young women, and securing the services of a plainsman and fresh horses, the detective set out to pick up the trail.

The absence of Simon Bristow aroused his suspicion against that worthy, and woe betide him if they chanced to meet.

CHAPTER IX.

TURNING THE TABLES.

In the confusion attending the capture of Diamond Dick, Jr., and his friend and assistant, the two young women were for the moment overlooked.

It all took place in so brief a time that no chance was given for thought.

The voice of Captain Calibre aroused their wits.

"Stop that girl!"

At the same moment he laid hold upon the bridle of Luella's horse.

Kittie Kelly was in the next moment clear of the group, and dashing away for life across the plain.

"You bet we'll stop her!" cried Jeff Hogan, digging his heels into his horse's flanks. "I want that gal for my own wigwam!"

"Bad cess to ye!" cried Pat O'Dale. "Av ye harrum wan hair av her purty head, it is mesel' ye will have to answer to, d'ye moind?"

Captain Calibre laughed.

"A fine situation you are in to talk about what you will do," he sneered.

"Release that bit!"

It was Luella's command.

She was leveling one of Bertie's pistols straight at his head.

"Thot's right!" sung out Pat. "Blow dhe whole thatch av his shanty off, if he don't!"

Terrell had let go promptly enough, at the order, with a well-feigned start, but in almost the same action he sprang forward.

The weapon was wrested from the girl's hand.

"Now, my pretty, don't try that on again," the outlaw advised. "If you do, I shall be obliged to

take harsh measures with you, and that won't be pleasant."

The young woman was vexed to tears, and covered her face with her hands.

Meantime, Kittie was dashing off at speed, with Jeff Hogan hot after her, and two or three others close after him.

Would she escape?

Simon Bristow now rode up to Captain Calibre.

"You have done me a big favor," he said, "and I'm under obligation to you."

"How is that?" Terrell coldly asked.

"Why, stopping this young woman for me—or, rather, helping me regain possession of her."

"Well, that's cool," said the outlaw. "I am doing this thing on my own account, my good fellow."

"You—you— What do you mean?"

"Just that. This young lady is my property for the present."

"By heavens, you had better have a care! I will —"

"Ha, ha, ha! What will you do? Come, now, what will you do? You had better be mighty civil here, I warn you."

"You do not mean to take her out of my possession?"

"I have not seen her in your possession yet. I am going to hold fast to her, if that is what you mean."

Bristow was pale, and he looked around to see where his aides were.

Two of them seemed to be as much Captain Calibre's men as any of the rest, while Nick Baytree—the name of the tool who had lured the girls into the trap, looked sullen.

He, we have seen, had fixed his mind upon Kittie Kelly.

She, by the way, was by this time far out on the plain, but Hogan had just overtaken her, and was swinging his "rope" around his head.

With a strong cast, he sent it whirling after her, and the loop fell squarely over her horse's head and brought the animal to a quick stop. But Kittie was out of the saddle almost instantly.

Terrell was watching, having made sure of his own prisoner.

He saw Hogan dash forward again, saw Kittie running on foot, then saw her stop suddenly and lift her arm.

There was a moment of suspense, then came a puff of smoke, and Hogan threw up his arms, and tumbled backward out of the saddle, the other fellows coming to an abrupt stop.

"Thunder!" cried Captain Calibre. "That she-cat has killed Hogan!"

"Hooray!" cried Pat O'Dale. "Thot's dhe shtoile, me darlint! Kape it up till ye lay thim all out!"

"You shut your mouth, or I will shut it for you," thundered the outlaw. "That shot shall be paid for, and dearly, mind what I tell you."

All eyes were turned toward the spot where the daring young Irish lass was bravely defending herself with the pistol with which Pat O'Dale had supplied her.

Hogan's companions had come to a stop, as said, and they were evidently debating the situation.

"A couple more of you ride out there," ordered Terrell. "That wench shall not get away after what she has done."

Two more started for the scene.

They separated, and made a circuit in order to come up with the young woman from the opposite direction.

Without a horse, Kittie could not hope to escape them now, and even with a horse she could not have done so, save, perchance, her horse were a thoroughbred.

The two men already near her were seen to dismount, and tie their bridles together short, against their horses' running off and leaving them, and they then advanced upon the girl on foot.

Again her arm came up, but as it did so one of the men fired a shot.

Kittie's weapon spoke the next moment.

Then the other fired a shot, and Kittie fired again, but the men were ducking and dodging and taking the risk of getting hit.

Two shots more, and then they knew the girl's gun was empty, and they ran in upon her, and made an easy capture.

By this time the other two were nearly out to where this was going on, and they drew in and joined their fellows.

"I hoped she would get away," sighed Luella.

"What good would that have done you?" demanded Calibre.

"It would, at any rate, have saved her from your hands," said the young woman, with spirit.

"Starving on the plains would be a worse fate," was the rejoinder.

The horses having remained near by, the men forced Kittie to mount again, and this time they made her secure to the saddle to prevent any further escapades.

Then they gave their attention to Jeff Hogan.

About this time he was seen to stick his head above the grass and look around in a dazed way.

They assisted him to rise, then to mount his horse, and all came slowly back to the point from which they had started out on the hot chase.

"Confound you! what did you try that for?" Captain Calibre greeted the Irish lass.

"To get away from the loikes av you," was the retort.

"Did she hit you hard, Jeff?"

"Look at the side of my head, and you will see," was the snarl.

The fact was, the bullet had just touched him

enough to knock him over. It had left a beautiful ridge on his cocoanut.

"But she shall pay for it, I have taken oath to that," Hogan further growled. "She won't do it again in a hurry, and I'll tame her before she is much older."

Captain Calibre now turned to Bristow.

"Now to settle that point with you," he said. "What claim have you got on this beauty?"

"She is my cousin."

"Ah! now I begin to see. You are the fellow who has been stealing that fortune of half a million away from her, because she would not marry you."

"That is neither here nor there. She is willing to marry me now, and I demand her release."

"That is false," spoke up Luella.

"Hear that?" said the outlaw, smiling. "The lady chooses me rather than you. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"I will tell you, you release her to me, and I will say nothing about the black box, which I see you have there on the horn of your saddle."

"Ha, ha, ha! Little good it will do you to say anything about it. I have got both the girl and the fortune, and I purpose holding on to them."

"Then you will not give up what is my own?"

"No, sir. The fact of the matter is, we did not come here on business, but to see the rainmaking experiments, but since this soft snap has come our way, we would be fools to throw it over our shoulders."

"But what do you intend doing?"

"No harm in telling you that, as I see. We are going to take them over into New Mexico with us, and we'll take you along, for fear the young lady may grieve for you."

This raised a coarse laugh among the band.

Meantime, the outlaw chieftain had given a quiet signal.

Three or four of his men pounced upon Bristow, and he was rendered helpless.

"I guess that is the only way I can fully trust you," said Terrell. "As for the rest of you fellows, you had better make up your minds to serve me, or you will fare worse."

"We are willin'," said one of them.

Bertie was saying nothing, but he was doing a good deal of thinking.

Here was a situation he could not see his way out of to save him, but he had been in tight places before.

There was, he knew, no immediate prospect for him to take a hand in the game, but he could wait for his deal to come around later on.

The new prisoner having been secured to his horse, and all the others put under guard, Captain Calibre started with them toward the rugged hills not far away to the west.

By noon they were well into the hills, and a halt was called.

After a brief rest, they were on their way again, and the whole afternoon saw them penetrating farther and farther into the wilderness.

For the most part, silence had been observed, save when occasionally Pat O'Dale broke out to relate some story of his Uncle Owen, or some experience that had befallen him.

At night they encamped on the bank of a creek, in a sort of natural rock basin.

Not far distant was a place where the horses could browse.

When sentinels had been stationed, the two girls were given the freedom of the camp for an hour.

A campfire was made, and a scant supper of dried meat was provided, the captain of the outlaws offering apology to Miss Monckton for such fare.

"In a day or two you shall live on the fat of the land," he promised her.

"I care not whether I live or not, if there is to be no escape out of your hands," was her dejected response.

"There will be no escape for you, but I will use you so well that you will be glad to remain, and then when we gather in this half million of yours——"

"You will never see it, sir."

"What do you mean? I have the black box, in which the secret of it is contained."

"Said to be contained."

"You do not believe what is engraved on the lid, then?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"I see, you would like to make me doubt, but you can't do that. Ha! but this game has played well into my hands."

"What do you mean?"

"Why here I was asked to assist in getting away with the black box, with the promise of a slice of the fortune, and here the whole fortune has come my way and its heiress with it. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bad luck to ye!" cried Pat O'Dale, "may dhe ould divil fly away wid ye before ye have a chance to open dhe box at all, at all."

"Thank you for that suggestion," said Terrell, with mock politeness. "Not respecting the old gentleman, but the box. You have that key with you, no doubt, Miss Monckton?"

"No, I have not, sir. You are cheated there."

"I believe you have."

"On my word, I have not, sir."

"Under the circumstances, I cannot take your word, but must search you."

"No, do not, pray do not; do not come near me; I detest you; I tell you the key is not on my person. Mr. Trusedale has it."

Terrell ripped out an oath.

"You don't mean it."

"I do mean it—I swear it."

"You will have to pardon me for disbelieving you, but I cannot accept your bare word."

The scoundrel ran and seized the girl, thereupon, and was about to carry out his threat of searching her for the key to the black box, when a cry from his men caused him to turn.

A shadow came between him and the firelight, and just as he turned his head to see what his men were shouting about a fist struck him squarely on the side of his neck, and he went over like a log.

That shadow—though rather substantial to be so called, was no other than Diamond Dick, Jr., and under his arm, as he ran on, was the coveted black box. With a shout of defiance, he knocked down yet another man who tried to block his way, and leaped boldly into the creek.

CHAPTER X.

DEFENSE—RESCUE—VICTORY.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had not been idle.

All during that long ride he had been quietly working away at the bonds that held his wrists.

This he had been doing on the sly, and at last had the satisfaction of knowing he could free his hands at any moment he chose to do so, and only waited an opportune time.

It came with the attempt of Captain Calibre to search Miss Monckton for the key to the black box.

Terrell had taken up the box while speaking.

When he rose to search the young lady for the key, he laid it on the round.

All the band were looking at their leader at the moment, and did not observe Bertie as he freed his wrists and cut the cords that bound his feet.

The first was when they saw him leap forward and pounce upon the black box, and they gave a yell and whipped out their guns, but they did not dare fire at him at the instant.

Their captain and his fair captive were in range.

Another leap, and then occurred what we have described, and Diamond Dick, Jr., was gone.

"After him!" screamed Captain Calibre.

He himself whipped out a gun and fired at the spot where Bertie had disappeared.

The others followed his example, and a shower of bullets spattered the water all around the place where it had closed over Bertie's head.

The wonder was that he could escape them all.

"After him!" Terrell again thundered.

"A thousand dollars to the man who takes him alive! He was the prize of the lot, to say nothing of the box he has carried off!"

They ran down along the bank of the creek, eagerly searching, and no attention was paid for the moment to the other prisoners.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had not thought of his own safety only.

Previously to freeing himself, that is to say, his feet, as last shown, he had freed Pat O'Dale.

He had cautioned him, however, to remain as if bound until he gave him the word for action, and Pat had played the part to perfection.

Now as Bertie was about to leap and run, he whispered:

"Pat, your chance! While they are after me, you take the girls, if you can get their attention, and escape in the other direction."

And so it was that while the pistols were popping and spattering the water of the creek in every direction, Pat O'Dale leaped his feet free and ran and caught Kittie Kelly by the arm.

"Come, darlint!" he whispered. "Folly me, and run loike dhe ould boy was after ye!"

She gave a start, at his touch, and was inclined to scream, but at the sound of his voice she checked that tendency.

Miss Monckton was only a step farther away, hands clasped in terror and her gaze riveted upon the place where Bertie Wade had last been seen.

Pat touched her arm, she turned her head, and his earnest motioning, and that of her maid, plainly told the young woman what was wanted, and she followed after them.

In passing the fire, Pat stooped and snatched up a couple of Winchester rifles that lay there.

Then they ran for life.

It had all taken place in a space of ten brief seconds, no more.

Pat was ahead at first, but he quickly slackened his pace and allowed the two young women to pass him.

"Run!" he cried, in a whisper. "Run fur dhe loives av ye! Go straight up dhe crick, and go as fast as iver yure legs stip it! Oi will protiect yez wid me loife!"

In the meantime Simon Bristow, himself a prisoner, had been yelling at the top of his voice to apprise Captain Calibre of what had taken place.

But in the general uproar, he was not understood; all were too intent upon retaking Diamond Dick, Jr.

Of a sudden there came a sharp command to halt.

It was the sentinel stationed at the top of the basin in which they had encamped.

Crack!

It was Pat O'Dale, with one of the Winchesters, and the bullet took the sentinel squarely in the middle of the breast, and he dropped like a log.

On the trio ran, but that shot had called the attention of those at the camp, and now they gave heed to what Bristow was shouting about, and there was another uproar immediately.

"Which way?" cried Captain Calibre.

"Straight ahead!" shouted Simon Bristow.

And away they went, pell mell, every man of them, in hot pursuit.

Finding himself alone, Bristow sat up and looked about him, and tugged furiously at his bonds.

But it was of no use then, he had wasted the day in which Diamond Dick, Jr., had been at work, and could not accomplish in a minute what Bertie had gained only after hours of patience.

"Curse my luck!" the fellow grated. "I am playing the losing hand, all around!"

And he was.

On went the outlaws, up to the basin toward the narrow part where the sentinel had been stationed.

There, of a sudden, the man in the van stumbled over the dead man, and went sprawling headlong, and two or three more went down on top of him in the mad rush.

It was dark, and this happened before they knew what was the matter.

But they were quick to discover what was wrong, and Captain Calibre's oaths were blood-chilling to hear.

He ordered his men on, now leading the way himself, but in the dark it was no joke, for the way seemed to grow narrower at every step.

Here the creek ran through a narrow gorge, dashing along with a gurgle and swish as it poured over and around the bowlders that lay in its bed, and in a few moments more men went tumbling into it.

It was a useless chase.

About the time they were coming to realize this, a voice called out to them from a point just ahead.

"Shtop plwere ye are, ye spalpeen!" was the cry. "An' if ye don't, by dhe powers av Oi don't pour lead into yez till ye can't rest azy!"

"There they are!" roared Captain Calibre. "At them, my boys!"

There was a shout, in the midst of which came a flash and a report, and one of the men tumbled into the creek with a death howl.

"Shtop plwere yez are, Oi tell ye!" cried Pat O'Dale. "As me Uncle Owen used to say, dhere is —"

"Dast your Uncle Owen!" bellowed Terrell. "Fire at him, men! Heave him down from there!"

There was a rattling volley, the flashes lighting up the scene for a brief moment, but the only result was a laugh of defiance from the Irishman.

Then Pat fired again, and another yell and another tumble into the creek was the result.

Surprised at his own good luck, Pat called out to them:

"Git back from dhere, ye spalpeens! Sure Oi can see in dhe dark, and by dhe powers Oi will pick yez off wan after another until dhere will not be a man left standing dhere!"

There was another volley in the direction of his voice, but the only result was another laugh, and another shot from Pat made them beat a retreat.

Pat listened till they were out of hearing, when he

stooped and whispered to the two young women who were crouching behind the boulder:

"Now, me darlints, we must make thracks out av dhis before dhey come afther us again. Go on wid care, and Oi will folly yez."

Meantime, Henry Trusedale had been active.

With Abe Arnold—that being the name of the old plainsman whose services he had engaged, he had tracked the missing girls down through the ravine and out to where they had been finally captured by Captain Calibre.

Here Abe Arnold made a study of the signs, finally reporting that it would be useless for him and Trusedale to go on against the band without re-enforcements, and proposed that Henry ride back to the camp of the rainmakers and get the soldiers.

This was done without delay. Henry sought out the captain in charge and made known the situation to him, and he did not appeal in vain. For that day the rainmaking experiments were abandoned, and the soldiers were sent forth to the rescue of the two young women, with a lieutenant in command, and with Abe Arnold as their guide.

Trusedale led the soldiers back to where Abe Arnold was waiting for him, and there the trail was taken up, and they pressed forward to the rescue with all possible speed.

Diamond Dick, Jr., knew what he was about when he shouted defiance to the outlaws and leaped into the creek.

He wanted to call attention to himself, in order to give Pat a chance to carry out his part of the programme if possible.

Bertie had taken particular notice of the formation along the creek, and knew that the waters had scooped out quite a space under the soft rock of the banks.

No sooner had he leaped into the water than he was under and out of sight, and he immediately got under shelter of the bank. There was plenty of room for him to lift his head above the surface, and feeling around, with his hand he made a discovery.

There was a hollow space leading back from the water's edge, and he worked his way into it, taking care that the footing was secure at each step he ventured.

The farther he advanced, the more shallow became the water, though he had to proceed in a stooping position.

It had been his intention to make his way down the creek under the bank.

Presently he came to a place where the roof of the little cavern was higher, and there was a corresponding rise of the floor, so that he was soon out of the water.

"Talk about luck," said Bertie to himself, "isn't this a slice of it? I wonder how Pat is making out? I am afraid he will not succeed, but there was a

chance worth trying. Now, I wonder where this hole is leading me to? I must use great caution."

And he did. He felt every step of the way. The ground continued to slope upward, and at last Bertie caught a breath of open air, and saw the stars twinkling merrily overhead.

In a few minutes more he was out and he took a hurried survey of his location to learn "where he was at."

He was on a rock plateau, and down below he saw the campfire.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed.

But the camp was deserted, and he listened to learn where the band had gone. He was soon told, hearing their voices in the gorge to the west of the pocket.

They were coming back, and Bertie waited to learn the result of their chase, for he knew that Pat O'Dale had succeeded in getting out of the camp, and no doubt with the two young women since they were not to be seen. There was only one man in sight, and that was Bristow.

Back they came, cursing roundly at their luck, and Diamond Dick, Jr., was delighted to learn that Pat and the girls had eluded their pursuers. They resumed search for Bertie, but soon gave it up, and Bertie heard them planning further search for both him and Pat at the very first peep of daylight. He resolved that, fortune favoring him, he would put a spoke in their wheel before morning.

The stars gave sufficient light for his guidance, and he made his way to the westward along the plateau, taking care, of course, to make no sound that would betray his presence. At length, he entered the darkened gorge, and proceeded carefully and cautiously along, with the noise of the creek to guide him, till it seemed to him that he had gone a mile at least, and he was wondering where Pat could be when he was suddenly challenged.

"Hould on, ye omadhaun!" cried a familiar voice. "Wan shlep more, and begorra it is a dead mon ye are!"

"Don't shoot, Pat," cried Bertie, joyfully. "Thank Heaven, I have found you."

Immediately joyful feminine exclamations were heard, and in a moment more Luella and Kittie were almost embracing their hero.

It was a happy reunion, and the young women were for putting distance between themselves and their foes without delay. That, however, Bertie opposed, with reason.

They were too far from home to think of returning without horses, and they were so greatly outnumbered that they could not hope to escape, anyhow, after daylight came, for they would be searched for in every direction. He proposed another plan.

They listened to him, and while it involved great risk to him, yet they recognized the force of his argument. He conducted them back the way he had

come, till they were on the plateau above the camp, where they stopped and waited. It was a long, weary wait, but at last not a man in the camp was awake, and then Bertie crept silently around among the sleeping men, stopping a few moments by each one, and the fire was burning so low that he could hardly be seen by his friends on the cliff. At last his mission was accomplished, and he was stealing back to the cliff, when a sound caught his ears. It was the sound of many hoof strokes, and presently, away to the east side of the basin, came a challenge immediately followed by pistol shots.

With yells, the guardsman came running into camp, hotly pursued by the soldiers on horseback, led by Abe Arnold and Henry Trusedale, and in another moment the outlaws were upon their feet, full of alarm and wild dismay. Bertie heard the click, click of their weapons as the hammers fell upon empty chambers, and before they hardly knew what had happened the mounted soldiers had surrounded them, and they were called upon to surrender. As the outlaws had not fired, the soldiers withheld their fire, and the truth of the situation was soon realized.

Captain Calibre and his men were soon made prisoners, and Bertie and Pat then made known their location with a hearty cheer.

"By dhe powers, but that was foine!" cried Pat. "Sure, it remoids me av me Uncle Owen——"

"That will keep, Pat," interrupted Bertie. "You help Miss Kittie."

"Wid all me heart, you bet!"

They were soon down from the plateau, and meantime, the campfire having been stirred up and replenished, they were able to see one another, and Luella soon found herself in her lover's arms.

Congratulations and explanations followed, and as all were tired it was decided to remain there till morning before starting on the homeward trail.

Bertie, meantime, had restored the black box to its proper owner, Miss Monckton.

At an early hour they broke camp and set out.

In due time, weary and exhausted, they reached the camp of the rainmakers, where they were cordially welcomed by the captain in charge, who, by the way, was in a state of perturbation.

Harris Weatherbee, the aeronaut, and Yank Thomas, his assistant, had disappeared, and could not be found. Inquiries at Drummond had thrown no light upon the matter, and the captain was at a loss to account for their conduct. A few words from Bertie, however, cast light upon the mystery.

The two men were not seen again. Alarmed for the consequence of the part they had played in the chapter of villainy, they had taken leg bail.

After a rest and something to eat, the party con-

tinued on to the hotel at Drummond, where Simon Bristow was handed over to the local authorities. The outlaws had been left under guard at the camp of the soldiers.

There Miss Monckton decided to open the mysterious black box, not only to gratify curiosity, but to reward her faithful rescuers and at the same time insure her inherited fortune against loss by further risking the secret to the keeping of the box.

It has been mentioned that Benjamin and Zachariah Monckton were misers. They had not, however, concealed their gold in unlikely places, but had invested it in securities at interest, and the black box contained merely a list of these, and the places of deposit, so that the heir might get them. Had the box been lost, it would have been a serious loss to the heiress, perhaps, and certainly would have benefited nobody else.

Miss Monckton wanted to reward Bertie, but he would not hear of it. Pat O'Dale, however, was eager to claim a reward for the part he had played, and the reward he asked was the hand of Miss Kittie Kelly. And he did not beat about the bush, either. He came right out with his request, and while he was not accepted at such short notice, neither was he blankly refused for all time, for Kittie's drooping head and shy manner spoke more loudly than words. Miss Monckton and Henry Trusedale were married there at Drummond, and Pat engaged himself to Trusedale as his valet.

"But," said Bertie, "I thought you would not marry the best woman in the world, Pat?"

"Begorra," said Pat, "Oi had no idea pwhat a darlint the best woman in the wurreld was, till Oi saw her, and Oi have changed me moind entoirely!"

Bertie bade adieu to them all and returned to the camp of the rainmakers, where, later on, he turned his prisoners over to Government officers who had been summoned to take charge of them, for Captain Calibre and his crew were badly wanted men.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 298) will contain, "Diamond Dick, Jr., on the Stage; or, The Do-Up at Dangerfield." Bertie ran a show once before, with Handsome Harry and the rest of the bunch, in the cast. You remember it, don't you, boys. He went into this new theatrical venture single-handed, but he found even more excitement than in the former one.



"Bellee fine contest. Me send entlee—win prizee—catch fishee."

That's what Bung Loo said when he heard of this contest. He's on a vacation just at present, and he's thinking seriously of writing up some of his own adventures in pidgeon English.

Don't let any grass grow under your feet, boys. Get into the contest quick, if you're not in it already. Full particulars on page 31.

Two Runaway Boys' Adventures.

(By James Halibut, Pa.)

We left a small town in Pennsylvania about six o'clock in the morning on a Lake Shore Railroad freight train and rode about five miles beyond Cleveland, where two tramps attacked us and took all the money we had away from us.

At a small watering station the two gentlemen of the road made us get off with them, they tied us, and one left to go to Cleveland to send a message to our parents to demand money to let us go. The one who had been left to guard us went to sleep.

My chum, whose first name was Harry, had worked his hands loose and was untying the rope about his feet when we heard the one who had gone to the city returning.

Harry was just setting me free when the one who had been sleeping yawned, but as my hands and feet were now untied, we got up and started to run away. After running about two minutes we heard the two hoboes yelling to beat the band. We ran all the way to Cleveland, where we went to the police station and told them who we were. They sent us home, where we became acquainted with a nice long blacksnake whip.

I sign this standing up in remembrance of that time. Running away from home is not all its cracked up to be.

White and Black War.

(By Foster Edwards, Texarkana.)

The negroes of Texarkana used to be a bully set. Whenever they caught a white boy out by himself they would jump on him, beat him up and take everything he had. The white's school was in the central part of town, and had about 500 pupils, of which number 200 were large enough to fight.

The nigger's school was two blocks below the white school on Swampoodle Creek and they numbered about 250 fighting bucks. Here is the story.

A crowd of us boys were in the habit of catching street cars. The cars run by both schools. One morning

at recess five of us boys got on a car and rode to the bridge over the creek by the negro school. The driver put us off at the bridge, so we went under the bridge to wait for the car to come back, but a gang of niggers came down on us with rocks and slung shots. They outnumbered us three to one, so we had to retreat. We got back to our school with a few bruised heads, and as mad as we could be.

I told the boys I would get even with the negroes. I was made captain or chief of the whites, so I went among the boys and told them to be ready at noon. The same day I appointed officers, and at noon we were ready, 200 strong, besides the officers.

I marched the little army four abreast down on the negro school. When we reached the creek the negroes were ready for us. The niggers on the west bank and we whites on the east bank.

We lined out along the creek and the fight was on. We fought for an hour, and the fight was fierce. One white boy was hurt and two or three niggers were knocked down. We were fighting with rocks. We were winning the battle when the negro professor rang for books, and the negroes broke for the house.

We hurraed and marched back to school covered with victory.

The fight was called:

"The Battle of Swampoodle Creek."

The leader of the negroes was a mean-looking boy of nineteen.

One day he caught a small white boy out of town and nearly beat him to death.

Well, I swore vengeance on the black race. I called the boys together, and told them my plans. They were to go in gangs of from ten to twenty, so we could protect ourselves. I was tired of the way the blacks were treating the small white boys and girls, so I went home and got my revolver—a .38—and put it in my pocket, for I meant business.

I got three boys to go with me. My pard's name was Tom Fulton, and it was his brother the blacks had hurt. The four of us got on the road the negro leader

and his friends had to take. The black leader's name was Batty Nickles.

We met him and ran him and his gang of half a dozen to an ally between State and Pine street, and he and his gang went between two houses.

We charged the house to the right. He wasn't in there, so I told two of my pards, Tom Fulton and Leo Vaughan, to watch the outside and I, with the other boys, went inside. I threw a brick through the door of the house to the left, and we heard some one in the house.

It was the black leader. He came to the door while the door was shut, and asked us not to bother him. We told him to step to the window and we would talk it over. He came to the window and swore if we would let him off he never would touch another white boy, so I agreed and told Jim Perry to let him out. Jim was the boy that went in with me. There was a crowd of niggers in the yard by this time, but I thought the fight was over. We were surrounded by the blacks and we were in a bad fix. Batty Nickles made for Jim Perry with a knife in his hand and a negro man made for me. Jim was unarmed and he ran.

The bucks crowded me, so I pulled my revolver and fired two shots. The first shot I fired at Batty Nickles. It passed close to his head, and I turned just in time to meet the negro man who had a knife in his hand. He made a leap for me and the other negroes were closing on me. I had one shot left so I raised my pistol and fired a shot into the man. He dropped. The negroes didn't make another move toward me. I stepped outside and walked up the alley toward the front, where I found a crowd of people who were attracted by the shot. I saw Batty Nickles in the yard. I started to shoot him and then changed my mind.

Batty said to me:

"You killed my friend, and I am going to kill you if it is the last thing I ever do."

I told him to go ahead with the killing. I would be there when it was done.

It has been two years since I killed the negro and Nickles hasn't killed me yet.

I was a boy of fourteen years when I had this trouble in Texarkana. They carried it to court in New Boston, Bowie County. I fought the case two years and it was dismissed from court.

A Thrilling Adventure.

(By John Matte, Hancock, Mich.)

One day a friend of mine called George Payne, and myself proposed to go hunting the next day. The next day came and we started out, taking with us our twenty-two rifles. We walked about four miles, without seeing any game, but when we arrived to Mud Lake cliff, it being called that name because there was a small lake at the foot of the cliff, which was mostly all mud, we met with a good adventure.

We climbed the cliff and walked for about a quarter of a mile when all of a sudden out of the bushes darted a large bear. It made straight for us. Of course we didn't know what to do, for we had no intention of meeting such big game.

We had no time to lose for he was upon us. We raised our rifles and fired at the bear, but it only maddened it worse. It checked the bear a little, so we turned around and ran back as fast as we could. My friend was more fortunate than I was, for he climbed a tree and I kept on running, for I didn't have time to climb the tree. The bear ran after me.

I wasn't thinking of the cliff until I dashed out at the very edge. The bear was coming on maddened by the pain it endured.

I was so frightened I didn't know what to do. There was a large limb that was sticking out of the cliff below me. I lowered myself off the cliff and reached the limb just in time for the bear had come up. He looked over the cliff at me for a few moments. All at once the bear turned around, lowered himself over the cliff and hung with his forefeet. I turned pale, for I knew that the branch wouldn't hold the both of us, and I didn't fancy having a bear as a companion. If the branch would break we would surely be killed, for the cliff was over fifty feet high. I didn't have time to do anything for the bear let go his hold and dropped on the branch. It resisted for a second and all at once it gave way. I gave a wild scream and dropped down, down to the rock below, but no. I landed right in the mud, and was buried up to my neck.

That mud saved my life, for if I had fallen a few feet further to the right where the bear fell, I would have been dashed to death on rock.

Meanwhile my friend having heard the scream hurried down to where I was and by his help I was enabled to get out. We took the bear's skin and his two hams and went home, having had enough for one day.


My Story.

(By Bernard Sandblom, Ill.)

One morning as I was walking through the pasture, at our little village of Chadwick, Mo., I was startled by a yell and turning around I saw a steer making for me. Some men were talking about the steer and while looking at its sore hoof it tore itself loose and dashed down the street toward me. It seemed to have picked me out of the other people, and did not mind the others, but dashed along after me. I saw him, and started down the street to the village. I ran as I never ran before, but for all that the steer was soon close behind. I did not want to go up on the sidewalk for fear of the other people getting hurt.

A little way down the street, I saw some men with a coil of wire. One end of it was tied to a post, and as I came nearer a man told me to get under the wire. I did so just in the nick of time, for the steer was close upon me, and as I passed the wire the steer tripped and fell within a few feet of me.

It never had a chance to go after me again, for it was bound as soon as it fell.

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